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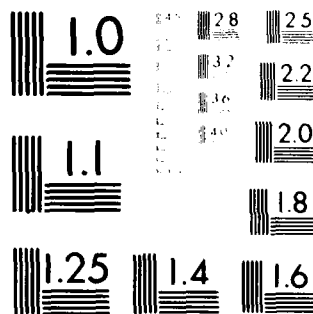
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A RAND NOTE

THE SOVIET UNION AND IRAQ SINCE 1968

Francis Fukuyama

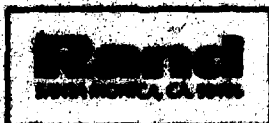
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→ The Soviet Union and Ba'thist Iraq have maintained a close political relationship since 1968 on the basis of their shared anti-imperialism. Soviet arms transfers and political and economic support have enabled Iraq to remain independent of and often hostile to the West. Otherwise, Ba'thist Arab nationalism and Soviet Marxism-Leninism diverge. From 1968 to 1972 Soviet-Iraqi relations were cordial but disputes emerged over the Kurds and the Arab-Israeli dispute. They were closest between 1972 and 1975, when Iraq's conflicts with Iran, the Kurds, Israel, and Western oil companies drove it to heightened dependence on Soviet arms transfers. In the third phase from 1975 to the present (1980), relations have deteriorated because of a reversal of the earlier dependencies. Iraqi oil wealth, the role that France has played as an alternative arms supplier, and increasingly sharp ideological disputes suggest that Iraq's present alienation from the Soviet Union may persist into the future. 81 pp. (Author)

A RAND NOTE

THE SOVIET UNION AND IRAQ SINCE 1968

Francis Fukuyama

July 1980

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Prepared For

The United States Air Force



PREFACE

This Note was prepared in 1978 as a working paper for the project "Implications of Soviet and Chinese Military Policy and Strategy for Air Force Planning" conducted for Project AIR FORCE by The Rand Corporation.

This study of Soviet-Iraqi relations was to complement the more extensive case studies of Soviet military assistance programs to Egypt, India, and Indonesia begun by Arnold L. Horelick before he left Rand in the fall of 1977 to become National Intelligence Officer for Soviet Affairs. Fritz Ermarth directed this work until he left Rand in the fall of 1978 to join the Senior Staff of the National Security Council. In view of the crisis in the Persian Gulf that began with the overthrow of the Shah of Iran in the winter of 1978-79 and that continued through the Soviet intervention of Afghanistan in December 1979, it was decided that this study was of particular interest and should be brought out independently of the others in this series.

The material has been updated to take account of events through the Soviet intervention and the immediate reactions to it, including an extended section on Iraq's opposition to the Camp David accords and the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty, its attempted unity talks with Syria, and the deterioration of its relations with revolutionary Iran since late 1978. Earlier sections of the study have been revised to take account of information that has come to light on Soviet and Iraqi behavior.

As this Note was being prepared for publication, Iraq and Iran were on the verge of open war. Such a conflict would have serious consequences for all concerned, especially the Soviet Union. Some attempt has been made to anticipate the results of present or incipient developments. However, politics in the Middle East are so unstable that entirely unexpected circumstances could arise that would date some of these

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conclusions. For example, Saddam Hussein or the Iraqi Ba'th Party could be swept from power in the near future, requiring that the study be substantially recast. Analysts can do little to avoid such problems.

SUMMARY

At first glance, Iraq looks like an ideal location for the expansion of Soviet influence. Iraq's growing political and military predominance in the Persian Gulf and Arab-Israeli theaters, its oil income, the consolidation of the anti-Western Ba'th Party's rule, and Baghdad's need for Soviet weapons all enhance the prospects for a larger Soviet role. Nonetheless, Soviet influence in Iraq between 1968 and the present (1980) has shown considerable weakness. Only between 1972 and 1975 was there broad and substantive cooperation between Baghdad and Moscow, primarily because the Iraqi Ba'th leadership has sought to follow an independent course in foreign policy. Iraq has also deliberately reduced its dependence on the Soviet Union by purchasing weapons from France, and it has been able to sustain such diversification programs because of its substantial oil income.

Soviet and Iraqi objectives overlap most fully on the issue of anti-imperialism and opposition to Western influence in the Middle East but differ or are irrelevant on the subjects of pan-Arab nationalism, domestic development, and external economic relations. This somewhat narrow doctrinal basis for Soviet-Iraqi relations has grown even more circumscribed by the coming to power of a Ba'th Party faction, led by Saddam Hussein, that has followed a policy of rhetorical toughness coupled with noninvolvement in military confrontations. The result has been pragmatic accommodation with Iraq's ostensible ideological enemies, belying Iraq's public image as a fanatical and irresponsible state. Baghdad's dependence on the Soviet Union has been more apparent than real.

Since the coming to power of the Iraqi Ba'th in 1968, it is possible to distinguish three different periods in Baghdad's relationship with Moscow. In the first (1968-71) and third (1975-80), Iraq's posture was characterized by a number of areas of disagreement and conflict. Only in the middle period (1972-75) did Iraq collaborate with the Soviet Union on a broad range of issues. Iraqi dependence on the Soviet Union was heightened because of (1) the nationalization of the Iraqi oil industry, (2) renewal of the war in Kurdistan in March 1974, (3) the outbreak of the October 1973 Arab-Israeli War, and (4) the Shah of Iran's massive armament program. Baghdad signed a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with Moscow in April 1972, admitted Communists into the cabinet, and substantially increased its level of arms purchases.

Since 1975, Iraq has again moved away from Moscow because the previous factors of dependence were nearly all removed. The most important event in this regard was the March 1975 Algiers agreement signed with the Shah of Iran, which brought to an end the Kurdish war and eased Iraqi-Iranian tensions considerably. A second factor was the revolution in world oil markets brought about by the oil crisis of 1973-74, which permitted a substantially higher volume of trade with the West and increased Iraq's hard currency reserves. Moscow was dissatisfied with both of these developments and tried to exert its control by in effect embargoing arms to Iraq in mid-1975. Baghdad was able to resist Soviet pressure by using its oil income to diversify its sources of arms purchases, primarily from France.

Perhaps as a result of the limited leverage that arms transfers offered, Moscow may have begun to place greater emphasis on the use of local Communist parties, and the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) in particular,

to enhance its political control. The Iraqi Ba'th Party reacted to this in the spring of 1978 by a major purge of Communist cadres in the army and elsewhere. What may have begun as an attempt by Moscow to protect its influence ended up as a serious conflict exacerbating tensions with Baghdad.

The period after late 1978 has seen the reemergence of Iraq as a major actor in the Arab-Israeli and Persian Gulf theaters. Baghdad played a crucial role in organizing the rejectionist coalition opposed to the Egyptian-Israeli peace negotiation and took measures to try to subvert the militant Shi'a regime of the Ayatollah Khomeini in Teheran. In the past this type of foreign policy activism has led to greater Iraqi cooperation with Moscow, but in recent years Baghdad's oil income and efforts to secure alternative sources of arms supplies have yielded increased, and perhaps long-term, independence. Disagreements over the treatment of local Communists and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan have left Soviet-Iraqi relations at a low ebb in early 1980.

Arms transfers have been an instrument of only limited political leverage primarily because of the ascendancy of Saddam Hussein and his pragmatic civilian wing of the Ba'th party. There are also vocal hardline factions within the party and army that at times have pushed Iraq into an adventurist foreign policy. The present ascendancy of a moderate wing of the party, although creating difficulties for Moscow, by no means implies a convergence between Iraq's interests and those of the West. Iraq's present pragmatism is a means toward ultimate hegemony in the Persian Gulf and perhaps throughout the Middle East, inevitably at the expense of both superpowers.

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I. INTRODUCTION

At first glance, Iraq looks like an ideal field for an expansion of Soviet influence, for several reasons.

- o Iraq is becoming a major regional power in its own right. In the 1950s, Cairo and Baghdad were recognized as the twin centers of power in the Arab Middle East. Iraq's prestige was eclipsed by Egypt's for more than a decade as internal political instability weakened Baghdad's international position, but it has begun to emerge once again as a key actor because of its oil resources and a tough, ruthless leadership that is likely to give the country an increasingly firm sense of direction.
- o Iraq occupies an important geographic position--close to the Soviet Caucasus, bordering on two important American allies (Saudi Arabia and Turkey), adjacent to Kuwait and Iran in the heart of the Persian Gulf, and close to the Arab-Israeli theater of conflict. It plays a pivotal role in both the Gulf and Arab-Israeli balances of power.
- o The Ba'th party that has ruled Iraq since 1968 professes a radical anti-Western ideology that appears to overlap Soviet foreign policy goals.
- o The Soviet Union is particularly well suited to take advantage of Iraq's position, given its ability and willingness to provide Baghdad with large quantities of sophisticated weapons.

Despite these factors, the 12 years of Ba'thist rule has been characterized by the weakness of Soviet influence. These years can be divided into three periods. The first, from 1968 to 1971, and the third,

from 1975 to the present, saw severe disagreements between patron and client over many issues. Soviet attempts to secure fuller cooperation were successful only between late 1971 and early 1975, suggesting that independence, and not collaboration, was the dominant characteristic of the relationship.

This case study will analyze why the Soviet Union has not been able to buy greater influence through its ability to supply arms. The central hypothesis is that the apparent similarities between Ba'thist and Communist ideology are not sufficient by themselves to ensure a close and continuing collaboration between the two countries and that the Soviets have had to exchange material support for political cooperation in an unsentimental way. The analysis will first identify Soviet objectives for Iraq and the ways these differ from Iraqi foreign policy goals arising out of domestic Iraqi politics. It will then investigate the specific dependencies that have brought Iraq close to the Soviet Union and the reasons why they could not be made permanent.

Contrary to common belief, a powerful group in the Iraqi Ba'th leadership has deliberately sought practical accommodation with neighboring regimes that the party ought to have opposed on ideological grounds. The Ba'thist radical ideology that has given Iraq such a reputation for extremism has for the most part been rhetorical. In practice, Baghdad has avoided involvement in local conflicts, so as not to become too dependent on Soviet armaments.

Furthermore, France has helped to displace Soviet influence in Iraq. Unencumbered by any embarrassing ties to Israel, and willing to promote its own interests aggressively, the French have steadily increased their military and economic dealings with Iraq since 1968.

Finally, much of Iraq's ability to remain independent of the Soviet Union derives from its oil income. Iraq currently produces over three million barrels a day of crude oil, making it (after the revolution in Iran) the second largest oil producer in OPEC. Iraq's proven reserves are currently estimated at close to 40 billion barrels, and may in fact be several times as large. Baghdad has acquired the hard currencies both to purchase European weapons and to deal with the Russians on a commercial basis.

The objectives of this study dictate its form in two respects. First, it will concentrate more on Iraqi politics than on Soviet policy. The intention is to illuminate Moscow's foreign policy as it affects the interests of the West; but to do so it is necessary to examine the specific opportunities present in such a strategically important country. Soviet ends and the means it has available to achieve them are straightforward and have not changed dramatically over time. The same is not true of Iraqi priorities; they are more enigmatic in part because domestic turbulence causes them to shift frequently and in part because Western analysts have paid them little attention. As will be seen, Iraq more than the Soviet Union has set the pace of the relationship.

The second consequence is that the analysis will proceed chronologically rather than topically. Most studies of Iraq tend to compartmentalize the different issues in Iraq's foreign policy; but to understand the reasons for Soviet influence at any given time, one must look at Iraq's level of dependence in all areas simultaneously and the way they interact with each other. No single issue or trenchant analytical tool permits a simple account of Iraqi-Soviet relations, and there is no

way of avoiding reconstruction of the complicated calculations and tradeoffs of both sides in different periods.

Finally, the interpretations presented here necessarily depend on inferences from limited data. Relations between Iraq and the USSR have not degenerated to the point that the Iraqis have published an expose of Soviet behavior in the manner of Sadat or Heikal. The reasoning behind most interpretations has been reserved for extended footnotes. Any ambiguities have been marked with qualifications. Although there is no evidence to interpret every facet of the relationship, the data are sufficient to support a reconstruction of the main elements with reasonable confidence.

II. SOVIET OBJECTIVES IN IRAQ

Soviet objectives in Iraq can be deduced from official Soviet commentary and from Soviet behavior. Of the six areas of interest listed below, not one completely or consistently overlaps with Iraqi goals. In some cases, the objectives of the two countries have coincided for specific periods as the result of circumstances beyond the control of either party; in others, the Soviets have consciously abandoned one objective to secure a more important one. In a very rough order of priority, the six are: anti-imperialism, the ICP, subversion of the Persian Gulf, the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Kurds, and economic interests.

ANTI-IMPERIALISM

The Soviet Union would like Iraq to maintain its anti-imperialist orientation and to act in ways damaging to Western, particularly U.S., interests. To some extent the Soviets probably view their support of Iraq as a general effort at anti-imperialist capital-building without any specific objective in mind. But it is possible to be more specific about how Iraq is expected to aid them in the struggle with the West.

In the military sphere, the Soviet Union would like to keep Iraq out of the Western orbit, at the very least to prevent a return to the sort of outright military alliance that existed under Nuri al-Sa'id. Beyond this, the Soviets would like to use Iraq for their own military purposes. Given Iraqi sensitivity to the idea of foreign military bases of any sort on their territory, Moscow has never explicitly stated a desire for facilities, but there is no reason to assume the contrary. Beginning in

1968, Soviet warships paid increasingly frequent visits to Iraqi ports,[1] although basing rights have never been granted. The development of Iraq's military infrastructure is of potential benefit to the Soviets' own intervention capabilities in the area, and it is perhaps with that design in mind that the Russians helped build the port of Umm Qasr.

Politically, Moscow receives support from the Iraqis on any number of extraregional issues. In joint communiques Baghdad has supported the Soviet position on European security and disarmament, recognized (in 1969) the German Democratic Republic, and expressed solidarity with pro-Soviet regimes or national liberation groups in North Korea, Vietnam, Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau, etc.[2]

Finally, the Soviets have encouraged Iraq to act in ways damaging to Western economic interests. Moscow supported all phases of Baghdad's project to nationalize its oil industry, first by supplying drilling equipment and marketing facilities to enable Iraq to circumvent the Western oil companies, and later by extending a political guarantee of sorts to protect Iraq from Western retaliation when it nationalized foreign oil holdings between 1972 and 1975.

THE IRAQI COMMUNIST PARTY

Moscow would like to protect and, if possible, improve the position of the Iraqi Communist Party. This interest is partly ideological, but it is mostly a matter of pragmatic state interests. Despite the 1964 decision to downgrade the support given to Middle Eastern Communist parties, Soviet

[1] The first of these apparently occurred in February 1969. ARR 69/73.

[2] See, for example, the joint communique issued after the visit of the Iraqi foreign minister to Moscow, March 26, 1969. FBIS SOV 3/27/69.

pronouncements show a persistent concern for the ICP.[1] The Russians failed to give the Iraqi Ba'th any support, even of the minimal sort granted Arif, until the new regime proved that it was not going to repeat the 1963 massacres of Communists. Thereafter the Soviets made sporadic criticisms of the regime for the not infrequent repressive measures it undertook against the ICP. Communist participation in a "National Front" government seems to have been one of the preconditions Moscow established for a deepening of ties with Iraq in other areas, although they were content to see this participation remain at a symbolic level.[2] Throughout the 1960s and early 1970s, what was important to the Soviets was not the actual exercise of power by Communist cabinet ministers but the accompanying legalization of the Party's activities to permit the creation of a stronger organizational base for future use. There is evidence, however, that the Russians grew more interested in playing their Communist "card" after 1975.

[1] Soviet commentaries on Iraq published shortly after the coup gave evidence of this concern by going out of their way to praise the left wing Ba'thist regime in Syria for its cooperation with the Syrian Communist Party. By contrast, the Iraqi Ba'th was treated skeptically: It was noted that Bakr and his followers had been responsible for the 1963 massacres and that the Iraqi branch was allied to the Ba'th National Command of Aflaq and Bitar, which had been ousted from Syria in 1966. Further indication of the cautious Soviet attitude toward the new regime is apparent when Moscow's reaction to the 1968 coup is compared with their response to the earlier Ba'th bid for power. In 1963, the Soviets weighed in with warm support and recognition for the new regime three days after the coup; this time, the Soviet press was completely silent on Iraq for more than two weeks after July 17. See G. Mirsky, "Developments in Iraq," New Times, August 1968; and V. Krapnow, "The Baath Party," International Affairs (Moscow), No. 10, 1969; FBIS SOV 7/23/68 and 7/31/68.

[2] The Soviets have of course never stated this condition explicitly. We can infer its existence because Moscow did not provide the wherewithal to defeat the Kurds until after Baghdad signed the Friendship Treaty and admitted Communists to the cabinet.

SUBVERSION OF THE PERSIAN GULF

Joint Soviet-Iraqi communiques ritualistically refer to a mutual desire to combat "reaction," by which is meant the conservative Arab regimes and Iran while it was under the Shah. However, for fear of damaging important interests in Iran and to avoid a confrontation with the United States, the Soviet Union has never shown an intention to support an outright armed conflict between Iraq and one of its neighbors. When Iran unilaterally asserted its claim to the Shatt al-Arab in 1969 and triggered a war scare, Moscow took a scrupulously neutral position and called for a peaceful settlement of the dispute.[1] Similarly, the Soviets urged moderation on the Iraqis in 1973 when the latter threatened to invade Kuwait to secure the islands of Warba and Bubiyan.[2] Moscow has chosen instead to support Iraqi efforts to promote internal instability in its neighbors through assistance to such dissident groups as the Saudi Communists, the Shi'a clergy, Arabs and Baluchis in Iran, and the Dhofar rebels in Oman.

THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT

The Arab-Israeli conflict is an example of an issue where the Soviet Union does not have an inherent interest in a particular outcome but instead uses it to generate dependence, and consequently influence, in the

[1] FBIS SOV 4/23/69. The Soviets at this time were also motivated by the concern that a conflict between Iraq and Iran would delay the departure of the British from the Gulf, scheduled for 1971.

[2] See Anne M. Kelly, "Soviet Naval Presence During the Iraq-Kuwait Border Dispute," in McGwire, Booth, and McDonnell (1975).

Arab states. [1] Soviet policy is dictated by the level of involvement necessary to maintain and if possible expand its influence in the area on the one hand, and by the degree of risk it is willing to run in support of its clients' interests on the other. Moscow has been ready to back certain Iraqi claims against Israel, but its position on this issue has not been decided by Baghdad's desires so much as by the situation in Cairo and, more recently, Damascus.

After 1967 the Soviet Union sought to reduce its risks by pushing its clients gingerly toward a political settlement, while continuing to arm them to bolster their negotiating position. The most notable effort in this direction was sponsorship of UN Resolution 242, which called for a settlement based on some form of recognition of Israel in return for withdrawal to the 1967 borders.

Soviet policy has gone through two phases since the Ba'th came to power. In the period between 1968 and 1973, Moscow supported the tentative gestures made by Egypt toward a political settlement and shielded it from attacks by the new radical states (such as Iraq, which opposed negotiations in any form). Since 1974, however, Egypt has sought to settle the conflict in a piecemeal fashion through American mediation, in a manner that threatened to leave the Soviet Union without any post-settlement role

[1] It was suggested earlier that the Soviet Union began "promoting" the Arab-Israeli conflict in the early 1960s as an alternative peg on which to hang its political influence in the Arab Middle East, in the face of the decline of anti-colonialism as an issue. The struggle with Israel had two advantages for Moscow. First, the dependence it created in the Arab confrontation states, particularly after 1967, enabled the Russians to secure and greatly expand their influence in those countries. Second, it appeared to be an issue around which there was a very high degree of Arab unity, so that by concentrating on Israel Moscow could avoid having to take sides in other inter-Arab disputes (as had happened with Nasser and Kassem).

whatsoever. As a result, Moscow shifted its support away from Egypt and toward more radical forces such as Syria, the PLO, and Iraq. These tactics tend to obstruct a settlement deemed undesirable by Moscow by making it much harder for Egypt to sign a separate agreement, giving Syria an alternative military option to prevent it from following suit. To achieve this option, Moscow encouraged formation of the so-called "Northern Front" alliance between Iraq and Syria.

The Soviet Union still wanted a settlement of the conflict and continued to press its clients to accept Resolutions 242 and 338, but the nature of the settlement had to guarantee a regional role to the Soviet Union; anything else it sought to disrupt. Hence Moscow found itself disagreeing with rejectionist states such as Iraq over ultimate goals (i.e., the existence of Israel) while supporting their opposition to Egypt's peace initiatives.

THE KURDS

The Soviet Union has supported Kurdish demands for national autonomy within Iraq not so much because it was interested in the fate of the Kurds, but because the Kurds have been useful to Soviet state interests. Of the several explanations that have been put forward for Soviet promotion of Kurdish nationalism, the most plausible one is that the Kurds have been seen as a lever, not against Turkey or Iran, but against Baghdad itself.[1]

[1] There are three other major explanations for Soviet support of the Kurds, all of them faulty in one way or another. The first is that the Soviets regard the Kurds as an authentic national liberation movement and therefore deserving of support as a matter of principle. There is an obvious truth to this assertion: Soviet commentaries on the Kurds give full recognition to the autonomy of Kurdish culture and the legitimacy of Kurdish national aspirations. But it is also an insufficient explanation. Soviet aid to national liberation forces in general is not an ideological given but a tactical measure undertaken for the benefit of Soviet state

This was most obviously true in the 1950s when Moscow had an outright opponent in Nuri al-Sa'id.

But even in the case of the more or less pro-Soviet governments that followed the 1958 revolution, Iraqi and Soviet interests diverged sufficiently to make Moscow want to preserve this potent trump card. Prolongation of the war against the Kurds in the north generated a tremendous demand for Soviet weapons, which in turn became an instrument by which Moscow could control Baghdad. Of course, Iraqi-Soviet relations were bound to suffer in the event that Moscow appeared to be deliberately encouraging the war. But even in the absence of active fighting, the Kurds

interests. When tactical considerations change, so does Soviet support. The Soviets have used and then abandoned other nationalist forces when they became inconvenient, such as the Azeri Turks in Azerbaijan in 1946. Something of the same sort was to happen to the Kurds in 1974.

A second and related interpretation is that Soviet support is ideological. It is true that the political arm of the Kurdish nationalist movement, the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP), has had a pronounced leftist bent. Mulla Mustapha was for a long time known as the "Red Mulla," and many of the younger intellectuals within the KDP were Marxist or Communist in orientation. But this explanation is less plausible than the first. Aside from the fact that it, too, fails to explain the tactical shifts in Soviet support, left-wing tendencies, however strong, do not amount to Communist orthodoxy; the latter position is represented by the ICP, which pretends to speak on behalf of all Iraqis, both Arab and Kurd.

A third explanation ignores considerations of principle and maintains that Soviet backing of Kurdish nationalism is due to Moscow's desire to keep the movement alive as a potential source of leverage against the pro-Western regimes in Ankara and Teheran. The last major Kurdish uprising in Turkey took place in 1929-30, and in Iran in 1946. Both were quickly (and ruthlessly) suppressed. The difficulty with this theory lies precisely in the fact that both Kurdish revolts took place long ago and were easily controlled. Although there is still Kurdish discontent in Turkey and Iran (more visibly in the latter since the revolution in January 1979), in neither case has it coalesced into an organized movement that seriously threatens the central government. In view of this fact, the Soviets by their support for Kurdish nationalism seem to be paying for a marginal gain. Moreover, there is little evidence that Moscow has actually tried to use a "Kurdish card" against either Turkey or Iran since 1946.

could be regarded as a type of insurance policy that could be activated if Baghdad got radically out of line.

Because the Soviets viewed Kurdish nationalism not as an end in itself but as a means of influencing the central Iraqi government, it is evident that their support for the Kurds could be bought away for the right price. As will be seen below, that is exactly what happened in the spring of 1974, when Iraqi cooperation in other policy areas became too important to be endangered by continuing Russian backing of Kurdish demands.

ECONOMIC INTERESTS

Finally, since the late 1960s the Soviets have felt an increasing need for hard currencies with which to finance purchases of Western technology. Because of its oil resources, Iraq has been one of the Soviet Union's few third world clients able to pay for its weapons with cash. The practical implication of this need has been a predisposition for the Soviets to seek to increase the level of their arms sales to Iraq as an end in itself, but there is no evidence to suggest that Moscow has been willing to provide Baghdad with arms in situations where for political reasons they would not wish to do so. This factor appears in the way the Soviets pursue other goals, but it is not a separate Soviet objective.

III. IRAQI FOREIGN POLICY

THE IRAQI BA'TH PARTY

Along with Syria and Algeria, Iraq is one of the few countries in the Middle East ruled by a party that possesses a coherent and well-developed ideology. Although the current Iraqi leadership is willing to deviate in practice quite far from that ideology, any discussion of Iraqi foreign policy must at least begin with the explicit agenda that the Ba'th party professes to follow.

The Ba'th party program is adequately summarized in their slogan "Unity-Freedom-Socialism." The first point, "unity," refers to the unity of the "Arab nation" that is said to extend from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean. The Ba'th believe that the present division of ethnic Arabs into separate states is a by-product of colonial domination. Much of the early activities of the party were dedicated to overcoming these artificial political borders: For example, the Syrian Ba'th were active proponents of the union with Egypt in 1958 that produced the United Arab Republic. Both the present day Iraqi and Syrian Ba'th parties maintain the fiction that there is a single, overarching Ba'th National Command serving the Arab nation as a whole, to which the individual Regional Commands that actually govern their countries are subordinate.[1]

Ba'thist interest in integral pan-Arabism has declined in recent years (stimulated in great measure by the failure of the UAR) and can no longer be said to be viewed as a realistic goal. To a great extent the struggle

[1] Since the falling out between the Iraqi and Syrian parties in the late 1960s, however, there have been two separate National Commands with their own sets of Regional Commands.

against Israel serves as a surrogate: Arab unity is understood to mean unity with other states and the Palestinians against "Zionist-imperialist aggression." For example, a 1970 Iraqi Ba'th political statement asserted that one of the party's aims was "to view the struggle for unity as a road to liberation and to consider the struggle for Palestine as the sound path to unity that will mend all effects of previous experiments." [1] Pan-Arabism also dictates a harder attitude toward the Kurds, not because the Kurds usurped land from the Arabs but because the Kurdish struggle for independence is just the tip of the iceberg of other ethnic autonomy movements that could undermine Arab unity.

The second objective, "freedom," means freedom from foreign domination. Given the political history of the Middle East in the twentieth century, this has meant independence from Western control, although it is important to keep in mind that the xenophobic streak in Ba'th ideology can apply equally well to the Soviet Union. The Ba'th party was born out of the national liberation struggles in Lebanon and Syria in the 1940s. After independence had been won, the parties there and in Iraq turned toward a dismantling of the remaining political and economic ties to the Western powers. The Iraqi Ba'th firmly supported Kassem's withdrawal from the Pact and once in power loudly proclaimed their intention to combat "military and hostile pacts, plans and blocs" that threaten world peace. Beyond Iraq itself the Ba'th expressed their hostility to any regime that by cooperating with the West serves as a "tool" of imperialism. The party saw nationalization of the oil industry not simply as an economic measure but as a political act designed to wrest "our remaining rights" from the

[1] FBIS MEA 4/14/70.

but as a political act designed to wrest "our remaining rights" from the foreign oil monopolies.[1]

The last point of the triad, "socialism," is also the one that has received the weakest ideological development. The Ba'th socialist program, as it emerges from official party manifestos and documents, is an eclectic mixture of state-interventionist measures that spring from a basically ethical or humanitarian impulse. It is precisely the sort of utopian and unscientific socialism at which Marxists are so fond of sneering. The Ba'th party rejects the Communist doctrine of class struggle, seeking instead the national unity of all Arabs. Its ideology calls for the nationalization of many (but not all) industries and an extensive social welfare system designed to give the masses the benefits of education, health care, etc. Collectivization is not thoroughgoing. Many forms of private ownership are protected in the constitution of the National Command, and in practice large concessions are made to private, and in some cases even foreign, capital.[2]

It is in the realm of foreign policy that the implications of Ba'th socialism become clearer. The party is unalterably opposed to Arab and Persian Gulf regimes that do not share its socialist and egalitarian ideals. The 1973 National Action Charter, to take a representative document, states a national goal to be "support for revolutionary changes in the Arab countries and backing for the progressive national liberation movements in order to strengthen the objectives of the Arab struggle and deepen its historical march."

[1] These phrases occur in the 1973 National Action Charter, the full text of which can be found in FBIS MEA Supplement to the Daily Report, 9/5/73.

[2] See Abu Jaber (1966), Chs. 8-9.

The Ba'thist doctrinal position on the Soviet Union requires special elaboration. Soviet Communism has never been seen as a particularly attractive model for domestic Arab socioeconomic development in Ba'thist eyes, and there has always been an element of resentment at Marxism-Leninism's pretension to being a universal and scientific doctrine. In the words of Michel Aflaq, founder of the Ba'th party and elder statesman of the current regime in Iraq, "There is no link or relationship between Communism and the history of the Arabs, between Communism and the intellectual tradition of the Arabs and their past and present life." [1] Orthodox Marxism obviously cannot speak to such central Ba'thist concerns as pan-Arabism, or its derivative, anti-Zionism.

There have been leftist tendencies within the Ba'th, such as the Jadid-Zu'ayyin-Atassi faction of the Syrian party that came to power in 1966, espousing a class-struggle doctrine largely Marxist in inspiration; but this faction was consistently opposed by Aflaq's National Command and his right-wing Iraqi allies, who had a history of open anti-communism. Any sympathy for the Soviet Union on the part of the Iraqi Ba'th has always been on the level of foreign policy, coming as a corollary of Ba'thist anti-imperialism: An enemy of their enemy was their friend. Party programs since 1968 have listed a "strengthening of ties with the peoples and states of the socialist camp" as an objective, but this was explicitly understood to rest on the basis of "mutual interests" in the struggle against imperialism and not on account of ideological affinities.

[1] Quoted in Buss (1970), p.2.

FACTIONS WITHIN THE BA'TH PARTY

Ba'th party ideology serves as a framework that unites the entire ruling group in Iraq. Although there are Communist and Kurdish Democratic Party ministers in the cabinet and nonparty bureaucrats in the ministries, the power of the state rests in the hands of the Revolutionary Command Council. The RCC represents the balance of forces within the Ba'th party and is dominated by it. The factional differences that characterize the Iraqi leadership operate within the context of the ideology outlined above.

It is possible to identify four groups within the party leadership having distinct positions on foreign policy.[1] As in the Syrian party, these are the product of two crosscutting cleavages.[2] The first is between what might be called "realists" and "idealists." This distinction is not meant to imply a difference in ultimate goals but reflects instead differing judgments as to the practical obstacles that stand in the way of the party's program. The idealists want rapid nationalization of Iraqi industry, and the realists are willing to permit large sectors of the economy to remain in private hands for the sake of economic efficiency and political stability. The idealists would prefer dependence on Soviet aid to avoid having to deal with the West, and the realists want to purchase the best possible capital equipment regardless of source. The idealists are more likely to want to intervene actively in support of any of the party's foreign policy goals, particularly against Israel, and the realists are more aware both of the power of Israel or Iran and of the internal

[1] The best discussions of factionalism within the Ba'th are contained in Kelidar (1975), and McLaurin, Mughisuddin, and Wagner (1977), Ch.4.

[2] For a discussion of party factionalism in Syria, see Rabinovich (1972), and Seymour (1970).

dangers posed by an independent army. In addition, there seems to be a quasi-tribal characteristic to the cleavage whose effect is hard to measure. The realist group is formed around a nucleus of Sunni Moslems from the small town of Tikrit in central Iraq, and their opponents are a heterogeneous group drawn together by a common resentment of Tikriti domination.[1]

The second cleavage is the split between the civilian and military wings of the Ba'th party. The Ba'th's lack of popular support forced it to rely on the army to come to power in both Iraq and Syria. In Syria the army ended up mastering the party civilians, although it was itself corrupted and split into competing wings; in Iraq the reverse seems to have happened. There were two reasons for this difference. First, President Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr played a special role in Iraq. Like his predecessor Abd al-Salam Arif, he was a military officer with a large following in the army who was determined to use his authority to "civilianize" Iraqi politics. Second, in Syria what united the civilians against the military was weaker than what divided the civilians against each other. The result was that each civilian faction called on its allies in the military, thereby strengthening the position of the military as a whole. In Iraq, by contrast, the civilian leadership seems to be fairly well agreed that the army should stay out of politics. The two wings have united in their attempts to master the army by transferring or purging unreliable officers, putting Ba'th party members through crash officer training courses, and

[1] In March 1977 it was announced that the party leadership would drop their surnames indicating geographic origin. This move seemed to be an effort to lessen the prominence of the fact that many Iraqi leaders are surnamed al-Tikriti.

indoctrinating the rank and file in Ba'thist ideology. Although this effort seems to have been fairly successful, the contrast with Syria should not be overstressed; the army does seem to be divided along moderate and radical wings just like the civilian leadership.

Apart from the issue of the proper role for the military in politics, there are several other areas where officers as a group have interests distinct from those of the civilians as a group. The military as a whole has taken a harder line on the Kurdish issue, as well as toward Shi'a discontent, tending to favor a military solution of these problems over a political one. Indeed, the Kurds seem to be the bête noire of the army. This attitude distinguishes military hardliners from their civilian counterparts. There is no unanimity on this issue, however. Before the end of the Kurdish war in 1975, one segment of the army apparently felt the failure to achieve a decisive victory was too great a drain on resources and morale and favored a negotiated settlement.[1]

The leadership of Iraq has been divided into four blocs, the radical and moderate wings of the civilian party apparatus and of the army. Ostensibly, power until 1979 has rested in the hands of an alliance between the moderate military wing, led by Bakr, and the moderate civilian wing, led by Bakr's fellow Tikriti Saddam Hussein. In fact, the pragmatic civilian wing has been predominant within the party because Bakr himself has wanted to take the military out of politics. Saddam Hussein seems to have been the tool that Bakr used to "civilianize" the army; it is difficult otherwise to explain how this ex-lawyer with no military

[1] Kelidar (1975), pp. 8-13.

constituency rose so quickly to become deputy chairman of the Revolutionary Command Council.[1]

Saddam Hussein's careful, noninterventionist foreign policy was evidently dictated by the still incomplete control of the party over the army.[2] To civilianize an army and make it a reliable tool of the regime is a slow and difficult process. The Iraqi military had been intimately involved in politics for many years. Until that process was complete, the civilian wing could not risk getting involved in conflicts that would tend to increase the independence or importance of the military. This was particularly true of the struggle with Israel, which required the stationing of a large body of troops in foreign countries for extended periods of time, where they would be exposed to influences other than Iraqi Ba'th orthodoxy. But it also applied to the units at war with the Kurds, which were additionally dangerous because of their greater proximity to Baghdad.

OTHER GROUPS IN IRAQI POLITICS

Aside from the Ba'th party, three other organized parties, although not sharing power in any real sense, were nonetheless important at one time or another as potential rivals for power. These are the two Communist parties and the Kurdish Democratic Party.

[1] Saddam Hussein first rose to prominence in the Ba'th party for having participated in the 1960 assassination attempt against Kassem. The young Saddam Hussein was wounded in the shootout with Kassem's bodyguards and, to the wonderment of his Ba'thist colleagues, dug the bullet out of his leg with a knife in the getaway car, hence his reputation for extreme toughness and ruthlessness. See Batatu (1979), p. 1084.

[2] This interpretation is suggested in "Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and the Kurdish Factor," Mideast Events, March 24, 1978.

The ICP, which reconstituted itself under the leadership of Aziz Muhammed after the 1963 purges, was a rather cautious organization, partly as a result of Soviet pressure and partly because of the party's own experiences in the period 1959-1963.[1] The party owed its very existence to the support it received from the Soviet Union, so it is not surprising that it followed Moscow's instructions with great loyalty. Not only has the ICP ritualistically denounced Peking, but it has followed the Soviet line in cases where doing so seriously damaged its popularity. The outstanding examples of this are its support for Kurdish autonomy before 1974 (never a popular position among Iraqi or pan-Arab nationalists) and its advocacy of a negotiated settlement with Israel based on UN Resolution 242. As a result of the 1978-79 purges, the leadership of the ICP has been forced to flee the country and the party can no longer be considered a major political factor.

Except for the two issues above and its emphasis on close ties with the Soviet bloc, the foreign policy program elaborated in party manifestos does not deviate from that of the Ba'th in any significant way. It is of course impossible to know how the ICP would act if it actually came to power and were faced with the realities of Iraq's current international position. But out of power it is free to play a role not unlike that of the hardline wing of the Ba'th party, pushing the regime into more activist policies by its criticisms. These policies, not coincidentally, tend to increase Iraqi dependence on Soviet arms and political support.

[1] A detailed history of the ICP until about 1970 is given in Uriel Dann, "The Communist Movement in Iraq since 1963," in Confino and Shamir as well as in Batatu's monumental work.

In 1964 a splinter group appeared in the ICP, led by Aziz al-Hajj. It was Maoist or Guevarist in orientation. It disagreed with the mainstream of the party over the latter's cautious attitude toward the existing regime and made a final break at least in part because of ICP support for Resolution 242 in 1967. This new organization came to be known as the "ICP/Central Command" (in distinction to the "ICP/Central Committee") and engaged in sporadic acts of violence against both the Arif and Ba'th regimes. The split between the two parties widened after the ICP/Central Committee joined the cabinet in 1973, and the ICP/Central Command allied with the Kurds in their struggle against Baghdad. The ICP/Central Command derived much of its strength from Shi'a discontent in the south but was ruthlessly repressed in an anti-terrorist campaign in the late 1960s and no longer represents a serious force.[1]

Finally, the Kurdish Democratic Party is the political arm of the Kurdish nationalist movement. Although the KDP does not have a foreign policy of its own, it had the second most powerful political base in Iraq, and its demand for autonomy had a crucial effect on Iraqi-Soviet relations. Divisions within the KDP mirror those within the Kurdish population. The nomadic, tribal Kurds in the mountains bordering Syria, Turkey, and Iran followed the unideological Mulla Mustapha Barzani and made up the bulk of the Pesh Merga partisan forces. The younger, urbanized Kurds tend to be more leftist and control the KDP faction led by Jallal Talabani. The Ba'th have tried to exploit these divisions with some success; Talabani's group was split off from Mulla Mustapha in 1969, as was another faction led by Aziz Agrawi in 1974.

[1] Kelidar (1975), pp. 8-13.

IV. BACKGROUND TO THE BA'TH: IRAQI-SOVIET RELATIONS BEFORE 1968^[1]

Iraq became a Soviet client shortly after the Hashemite monarchy was overthrown by Brigadier Abd al-Karim Kassem on July 14, 1958. There was no reason of principle why Moscow should have thrown its support to the new Iraqi regime: Kassem was one of several nationalist Free Officers, who as a group lacked a clearcut ideology and were united only by their opposition to Nuri al-Sa'id. Indeed, to the extent that Kassem had any pre-revolutionary ideological proclivities, he leaned toward the liberalism of the Iraqi National Democratic Party; and once in power he proved willing to collaborate indifferently with anyone he felt could be of use to him. But his interests coincided with the Soviet Union's in two crucial respects: He sought to cut Iraq's ties with Britain and the United States, and within the Arab sphere he was willing to ally with the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) and to oppose Nasser's anti-Communist pan-Arabism.

The commitment to neutralism was an abiding interest from which Kassem did not deviate; the Baghdad Pact had been one of the Revolution's primary grievances against the old regime. The ending of Iraq's ties with the West closed off her traditional sources of arms, thereby creating a critical need that would form the basis of Soviet influence in that country. The first arms transfer agreement between Iraq and the Soviet Union was signed in November 1958.

Kassem's alliance with the Iraqi Communist Party was based on tactical considerations arising out of internal Iraqi politics. Immediately after coming to power, the Free Officers' Movement fell into two rival factions:

[1] For a fuller account of Soviet-Iraqi relations in this period, see either Smolansky (1974), Chs. 5, 7, and 9; or Lenczowsky (1972), Ch.7.

A pan-Arabist wing led by Abd al-Salam Arif, and a heterogeneous group under Kassem's leadership, which for lack of a better title may be described as Iraqi nationalists. The former had the backing of both Nasser and the Ba'th party. Against them Kassem sought the support of those groups in Iraq opposed to pan-Arabism--most notably the Kurds, who feared being swallowed in a sea of Arabs, and the Communists, who feared a Nasserite purge similar to what had happened in Syria after the formation of the UAR.

The ICP's power peaked in July 1959, when the Communists used a brawl between local Kurds and Turkomans in Kirkuk as an excuse to eliminate many of their old rivals. By this point the ICP had outlived its usefulness and had itself become a threat to the regime's authority. Kassem turned on it and attempted to restrict its political power. In January 1960 a new associations law was passed, under which the regime refused to legalize the official Communist party backed by the Soviet Union. Later that year the regime began jailing Communists and in December executed several party members.

Moscow's failure to reverse this trend demonstrates the limitations of Soviet influence over Iraq. Pressure on Baghdad was verbal: The Soviet press began what was eventually to become a noisy propaganda campaign against Kassem's persecution of "patriots" and "democrats" and supported Kurdish demands when the civil war in the north began in 1961. This had no effect on the fortunes of the ICP and merely led to angry countercharges by Kassem that Moscow was interfering in internal Iraqi affairs.

The Russians were deterred from manipulating the flow of arms for two reasons. First, Iraqi neutralism was as important to the Soviets as it was to the Iraqis themselves and was considerably more important than the fate

of the local Communist party. It is not clear that a Kassem regime faced with a choice of turning back to the West for arms or tolerating what it regarded as an acute threat to its own survival would automatically choose the latter. And second, even if the risk of driving Kassem to the West were judged small, the possible rewards were themselves marginal. Kassem did not physically eliminate the ICP, he merely restricted some of its activities; in any event, he protected the party from Nasser and the domestic pan-Arabs. The Soviet Union had little hope of the ICP coming to power in the near future, so it was hardly worth jeopardizing the relationship with Iraq for a small improvement in the party's position.

The importance Moscow attached to different degrees of anti-Communist repression became all the more evident when Kassem was overthrown by a Ba'th coup on February 8, 1963. The radical wing of the party led by Ali Salih al-Sadi proceeded to do what Kassem had studiously avoided: They began to eliminate the ICP physically as a political force. By one estimate 3,000 party members were killed.[1] This was the line beyond which the Soviets could not be pushed with impunity, particularly where Iraq's anti-Western posture could more confidently be taken for granted. Besides a hysterical press campaign against the "fascist" regime in Baghdad, Moscow suspended military aid to Iraq and threw greater support to the Kurds, who were thereby encouraged to intensify the fighting in the north.

The cutoff of arms transfers succeeded in its purpose in a roundabout way. Although the Ba'th regime itself failed to moderate its repression of Communists, its irresponsible behavior in this and in every other area of Iraqi political life caused the military, in the form of General Abd

[1] Cooley (1975), p. 34.

al-Salam Arif, to step in and depose the party from power in November 1963. Arif and the ICP reached a modus vivendi whereby the ICP resumed its "normal" underground operations. Arif was a nonideological officer with no predisposition toward the Soviet Union, but he recognized the importance of Soviet weapons, particularly in view of the continuing war with the Kurds. His toleration of the ICP led to a resumption of Soviet arms aid by June of 1964.

Arif's mildly repressive measures against the ICP did not lead to a return to the sorts of polemics that characterized Soviet-Iraqi relations between 1960 and 1963. Moscow attempted to streamline and rationalize its Middle East commitments by dropping its support for local Communist parties whenever such support seemed to endanger the more important relationship with the existing nationalist regime. This appears to have been the result of a general policy decision taken by the Soviets in late 1964.[1]

As anti-colonialism began to lose its emotional appeal in the 1960s, anti-Zionism came to occupy an increasingly important role in Soviet pronouncements as the basis for Soviet-Arab collaboration. The June War advanced by a quantum leap the process begun earlier. After 1967, Iraq began to station forces in Jordan and Syria on a long-term basis, which increased its need for Soviet weapons. This, as well as the festering war in Kurdistan, guaranteed a certain minimum level of Soviet influence with Baghdad.

[1] The evidence for such a decision having been taken is discussed in Safran (1969), p. 128.

At about that time, economics began to play almost as important a role as arms transfers in shaping Iraq's attitude toward the Soviet Union. The Arif regime sought to retaliate against Israel's Western backers by asserting greater control over Iraq's oil resources. The state-owned Iraqi National Oil Company (INOC) was given leave to exploit concessions formerly held by the London-based Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC). For this Baghdad sought technical expertise from both the Soviet Union and France. In April 1968 the INOC signed an agreement with Moscow to begin exploitation of the large, undeveloped oil field in North Rumaila. For the next six years Soviet assistance in helping Iraq market its crude oil independently of Western oil companies helped to draw Iraq close to the Soviet Union.

V. CAUTIOUS APPROACHES, 1968-71

Soviet influence in Iraq during the first three years of Ba'thist rule was not particularly great, whether measured in terms of the volume of arms transfers or by the degree to which Iraqi foreign policy coincided with the full range of Soviet goals. Between July 1968 and the proclamation of the new Iraqi National Action Charter in November 1971, four publicly announced visits by Iraqi military delegations and three by the political leadership to the Soviet Union produced arms transfer agreements that were as a rule a full order of magnitude smaller than those of the period immediately following. This low level of support (comparable to the amounts transferred to Arif) reflected major disagreements in two key policy areas.

The first concerned the role of the Iraqi Communists. The Ba'th government that came to power in 1968 did not antagonize the Soviet Union needlessly by repeating the physical purge of Communists that it carried out during its previous tenure in office. Indeed, it made the gesture of offering to negotiate with the ICP over formation of a National Front government soon after the coup. But it continued to jail, harass, and occasionally execute Communists; and it was clearly not willing to share power with the ICP in any serious way. The repressive measures became particularly severe after the settlement of the Kurdish war in March 1970, when open and bitter arguments broke out between the Ba'th and the ICP. Moscow was dragged into this dispute, as were other European Communist parties, and openly attacked Baghdad for its mistreatment of Communists in a manner highly reminiscent of the later stages of Kassem's rule.[1]

[1] Controversy between the Ba'th and Communists broke out into the open in June, when the Communists complained at length over their mistreatment at the hands of the Ba'th in recent months. In early July the two

The second area of disagreement was the Arab-Israeli dispute. The Iraqis, unlike Egypt, had failed to accept UN Resolution 242 when it was passed in November 1967 and bitterly denounced any efforts to negotiate an end to the conflict. This fell afoul of Moscow's attempts to push Nasser gently toward a political settlement, particularly after the August 1970 ceasefire which brought to an end the War of Attrition. Nasser's acceptance of the ceasefire, and the proposed negotiations over Resolution 242 to which it was linked brought forth a torrent of abuse from Baghdad against the Egyptian president's "capitulationism." In defense of Nasser, Moscow replied by attacking the Ba'th for what one Pravda editorial called its "incomprehensible position." [1] It urged Baghdad to cease its propaganda against Egypt and to accept 242. But a very stormy meeting between the two countries' leaderships shortly thereafter failed to alter the Iraqis' intransigence. [2]

state-controlled papers Al-Jumhuriya and Al-Thawra replied by delivering simultaneous attacks on "exploiting groups (the Communists) who have had their illegal privileges wrested from them" who were trying to upset the Kurdish settlement (ARR 70/381). The French Communist Party newspaper L'Humanité then charged the Ba'th with having conducted a campaign of arrests against the ICP. The lengths to which Bakr went to deny this charge suggest that there was some truth to it (FBIS MEA 7/21/70).

Statements made at the beginning of 1970 indicated that the Russians expected the settlement of the Kurdish war to remove a major obstacle to ICP participation in a National Front government. One can imagine Moscow's surprise when Baghdad made the required concession to the Kurds but then unexpectedly increased its suppression of the ICP. It was at this point that the Soviets began to criticize the Iraqi Ba'th for individual arrests and detentions. For example, an article in the paper Sovetskaya Rossiya stated, "Soviet Communists, indeed all Soviet people, express solidarity with the Iraqi Communists and democrats in connection with the deaths of Kazym al-Jasim and Aziz Hamid, and demand that an end be put to criminal acts of this kind." (FBIS SOV 2/11/71.)

[1] FBIS SOV 8/30/70.

[2] The final communique issuing from this meeting lists agreements on every conceivable topic except for the Arab-Israel conflicts. (FBIS SOV 8/30/70.)

To secure Iraqi cooperation on these two issues, the Soviets could take advantage of the arms dependency generated not only by the conflict in Palestine but by the war against the Kurds, which resumed in November 1968, and a potential war with Iran, which arose in the wake of the Shah's abrogation of the 1937 treaty governing the Shatt al-Arab river.[1] The military problem that Iraq faced can be stated precisely. In 1969 the Iraqi army consisted of 15 or 16 brigades grouped into five divisions. Of these, three were stationed in Jordan, one in Syria, four had to be moved to the south to guard the border with Iran, and three were retained in Baghdad to protect the regime itself. This left only four or five brigades to fight the Kurds in the north. The winter before, a 12-brigade offensive had failed to attain any of its objectives.[2] A radical increase in Soviet military assistance would thus be crucial if the regime were to defend itself and meet all of its foreign policy goals.

Why then was Moscow unable to exploit this apparently tremendous need to secure a better position for the Iraqi Communists, or Ba'thist acceptance of 242? To the extent that an answer is available, it appears that Ba'thist isolation and dependence were more apparent than real. The Iraqis did not want to allow the conflicts with Israel or Iran to develop

[1] The Shatt al-Arab is formed by the confluence of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, and the access route to the Persian Gulf for both the Iraqi port of Basra and the Iranian port of Khurramshahr. The 1937 treaty established the border at the low water mark on the eastern bank of the river. The Iranians have for long argued that the border ought to follow the thalweg, or deepest part of the waterway, according to the practice of most other riverine states. In April 1969 the Shah announced that Iran would henceforth regard the thalweg as the legal border, and sent a convoy down the Shatt al-Arab to back up this claim. The Iraqis protested the move but did nothing to impede Iranian traffic down the river. They formally agreed to the thalweg line as part of the Algiers agreement in March 1975.

[2] O'Ballance (1973), p. 154.

into hot wars, and they hoped to bring an end to the war in Kurdistan. The fact that there were Iraqi leaders interested in securing de facto détente on all three fronts in a manner seemingly so contrary to the extremism of Ba'thist ideology was in turn the result of certain changes in Iraqi domestic politics--namely, the consolidation of Saddam Hussein's power against his military rivals.

The latter process took two and a half years to complete. Because the Ba'th had relied on the army to come to power, the 1968 Revolutionary Command Council consisted entirely of military officers: four Ba'thists (Bakr, Salah Mahdi Ammash, Hardan Tikriti, and Hamad Shihab al-Tikriti) and two independent Nasserites (Abd al-Razzaq al-Nayif and Abd al-Rahman al-Daoud). The two non-Ba'thists were the first to be purged in a palace coup on July 30, 1968.

But the decisive event in the civilian-military power struggle came in November 1969, when the RCC was expanded from five to 15 members by an influx of civilians, among them the hitherto obscure Saddam Hussein. The army could count on getting no more than five or six votes in the reconstituted RCC and for the first time became a clear minority in the party.[1] Unhappy with its new role and with the reports reaching it of the impending settlement with the Kurds, the army struck back in January 1970 in a coup attempt led by General Abd al-Ghani al-Rawi. The party's intelligence apparatus stayed on top of the plot and succeeded in implicating and purging as many as 300 officers reportedly connected with

[1] McLaurin, Mughisuddin, and Wagner (1977), p. 122.

it.[1] The failure of the coup strengthened Saddam Hussein and his followers sufficiently for them to go ahead with their plans for detente.

The regime's preference for disengaging rather than fighting was most clearly evident in Kurdistan, where the Ba'th reached what was by any criteria a very generous settlement with Mulla Mustapha. Saddam Hussein personally negotiated the March 11, 1970 agreement, which called for a substantial degree of autonomy in areas with a Kurdish majority; a Kurdish vice-president and five Kurdish cabinet ministers; and proportional representation in the army, bureaucracy, legislature, and universities. It can be argued that the accord did not reflect genuine moderation because it was forced on the regime by its inability to impose the desired military solution. The final offensive in August 1969 went badly for Baghdad, but the Iraqis had alternatives: They could have turned to the Soviets for new arms, which in time might have changed the course of the war. This is exactly what they decided to do in 1974, and the Soviets then proved willing to oblige. The fact that this did not occur in 1969-70 therefore indicates an intention not to accept the consequences of using Soviet aid in order to pursue a military victory, and not an insuperable lack of ability to do so.

A similar caution and restraint characterized Iraqi policy toward Israel, surprising as this may sound. On a rhetorical level the desire to liquidate the state of Israel seems an obsessive preoccupation of the Ba'thist ideology. Baghdad provided support for the most radical Palestinian fedayeen groups, such as George Habash's Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine; but the Iraqi Ba'th failed to help the

[1] O'Ballance (1973), p. 158.

Palestinians whenever support for their cause appeared at all costly. The Ba'th were one of the first regimes to clamp down on the activities of radical Palestinians in their own country. Their sponsorship of the fedayeen Arab Liberation Front was at least in part an attempt to channel the energies of Palestinian Iraqis in a safe direction--away from Iraq. More significantly, the three Iraqi brigades stationed in Jordan failed to intervene on behalf of the PLO when the latter was being crushed by King Hussein's army during the 1970 civil war. Officially, General Hardan Tikriti was blamed for the force's inaction and was exiled from Iraq. But there are reasons for believing that Saddam Hussein played an important role in this decision,[1] among them that the Iraqi brigades did not help the Palestinians during the fighting that occurred between the PLO and Jordanians later that year, well after Hardan Tikriti's dismissal. The regime had indicated for over a year that it was seeking a pretext under which to withdraw its forces entirely, and it finally found one in January 1971.[2]

On the southern front, it soon became plain that the Ba'th leadership did not take the Iranian threat very seriously. Baghdad took some retaliatory measures against the Shah, bringing the matter before the UN and expelling Iranian pilgrims living on Iraqi soil. But the "war scare" that was supposed to have existed at the time had a manufactured quality. The brigades along the southern sector of the border with Iran were removed

[1] A bitter argument was said to have taken place between the pro-interventionist Michel Aflaq and Saddam Hussein, suggesting that they were on opposite sides of the fence (FBIS MEA 10-16-70). The view that the RCC was unanimously opposed to intervention and used Hardan Tikriti as a scape-goat is also supported in McLaurin, Mughisuddin, and Wagner (1973), pp. 124-125.

[2] Kimball (1972), p. 150.

altogether in August 1969 to participate in the offensive against the Kurds.[1]

[1] O'Ballance (1973), p. 155.

VI. IRAQ TURNS TO THE SOVIET UNION 1972-75

From 1972 to 1975, Iraq and the Soviet Union drew very close to one another. The level of arms transfers increased rapidly, more than doubling the size of the Iraqi army in less than five years. This was accompanied by intense political collaboration on issues over which the two countries had previously been at odds. The causes of this growth in Soviet influence can be traced to the emergence of several specific Iraqi dependencies, which in the end proved transitory. These concerned oil, the Kurds, Israel, and Iran.

THE IMPORTANCE OF OIL

Nationalization of the holdings of foreign oil companies in Iraq was not only consistent with Ba'th party ideology but would maximize Iraqi revenues over the long run; both the idealist and pragmatist wings of the party were therefore in full agreement. The project was obviously well thought out, and its timing was related less to political events than to the development of an indigenous capability to manage the oil industry and the economic side effects of nationalization. Soviet economic and political assistance--but not arms transfers--was necessary in all phases of this effort.

The Iraqi Ba'th had carefully studied the lessons of previous efforts by Iraqi regimes to assert greater control over their oil resources. Law 80, passed by Kassem in 1961, had nationalized 99.5 percent of all unexploited concessionary areas held by the Iraq Petroleum Company. The company retaliated by halting practically all new exploration and investment in Iraq for the next several years. The Ba'th hoped to render Iraq less vulnerable to similar actions when it carried out its anticipated

round of nationalizations by developing alternative sources of oil drilling equipment and know-how, pipelines, tankers, and crude oil marketing facilities. In this the Soviets, and to a lesser degree the French, played a crucial role. The Arif regime had signed the original contracts with Moscow to help INOC develop the North Rumaila field, and work intensified under the Ba'th until INOC was finally ready to begin production in April 1972. Production from North Rumaila would meet the expected shortfall in crude oil output that would occur in the wells owned by the Iraq Petroleum Company when they were taken over.

The Iraqi-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation was signed on April 9, 1972, in ceremonies that jointly commemorated the opening of the North Rumaila oilfield. The timing and the context strongly suggest that the treaty was sought as a political guarantee to protect Iraq from covert or overt Western military retaliation for nationalization of the Iraq Petroleum Company.[1] Although the text of the treaty contains no explicit guarantees, it pledges consultation in the event of "situations that threaten the peace" and development of "cooperation in strengthening their defense capabilities." Kosygin's speech at the signing ceremony emphasized that "the Soviet Union is wholly on the side of the Arab states that are waging a struggle to see to it that their natural resources, petroleum above all, belong to their real masters--the peoples of these

[1] In a visit to Moscow in February 1972, Saddam Hussein asserted, "Our people are facing the conspiracies and intrigues of imperialist circles in Britain and America and of the monopolistic companies which are engaged in large-scale conspiratorial and destructive activity against our people." It is not certain, of course, whether this bit of paranoia reflects the real thinking of Ba'thist leaders. Soviet Union and the Third World, 14 February - 12 March 1972.

ountries." [1] The treaty may have been meant to formalize Soviet assistance in economic aspects of the nationalization effort, but this help had been forthcoming for five years without requiring a treaty. However, the fact that the Iraq Petroleum Company was nationalized on June 1, less than two months after the signing of the treaty, implies that both sides had in mind a political guarantee.

Arms transfers played a very small role in Moscow's ability to meet Iraq's needs at this juncture. Soviet economic assistance had been useful in enabling the Iraqis to act independently of the Western oil companies, and the implicit threat of a Soviet intervention with its own forces to protect Iraq against retaliation netted the Friendship Treaty. Large scale deliveries of weapons did not begin until September 1972, well after the peak of the nationalization crisis had passed.

RESURGENCE OF THE KURDISH ISSUE

Saddam Hussein had revealed his preference for détente with the Kurds by negotiating the March 1970 agreement, but there were elements in the party, and particularly in the army, who were very unhappy with the degree of autonomy the Kurds were allowed to retain. The consolidation of civilian rule was only apparent. In June 1973 the most serious coup attempt to date occurred, led by the Director of Internal Security Nazim Kazzar. Kazzar, although a civilian, represented military interests insofar as he was opposed to Saddam Hussein's cooperation with the Kurds. (He was also a Shi'i from the south who vowed to "wipe Tikrit off the map," illustrating the regional and confessional aspects of the power

[1] The full text of the treaty appears in CDSP, Vol. 24, No.14, pp. 11-12.

struggle.))[1] This plot, unlike the 1970 coup attempt, was unanticipated by Bakr and Saddam Hussein. Although ultimately successful in suppressing Kazzar and his military allies, they were severely jolted by what his plot revealed about the extent of military opposition to their Kurdish policies. At the same time, the Kurds themselves and their outside backers bore responsibility for undermining the 1970 agreement. Under the "Nixon Doctrine," the United States began to urge Iran to increase its arms purchases and assume the role of Persian Gulf policeman in the wake of the British withdrawal. When Nixon stopped in Teheran on the way back from the Moscow summit in May 1972, the Shah of Iran indicated his willingness to take on this role, but demanded U.S. support for his backing of the Iraqi Kurds to tie down Baghdad while he was modernizing his forces. Iraq's Kurdish problem therefore merged to a great degree with its Iranian problem; Baghdad faced both a domestic insurgency and an increasingly powerful Iran at the same time.

The result was the reopening of the Kurdish war and closer relations with the Soviet Union. Unlike the suppression of the Rawi uprising, which enabled Saddam Hussein to appease the Kurds, the Kazzar putsch seems to have convinced him that it was safer to appease the military instead. On March 11, 1974, exactly four years after the last agreement, the Iraqi government issued an ultimatum ordering the Kurds to accept a unilaterally proclaimed "autonomy" plan. The plan reneged in effect on many of the promises made earlier, particularly by its exclusion of the oil town of Kirkuk from Kurdish control. When the KDP rejected the plan, Bakr replaced the party's five ministers with "tame" Kurds loyal to the Ba'th, called up

[1] Kelidar (1975), p.9.

reserves, and began military operations in the north to enforce the government decree.[1]

The Soviet Union's treatment of the Kurds in 1974 is a revealing example of their use of national liberation movements to further their own state interests. In the four years since the March 1970 agreement, Moscow's stake in the Iraqi Ba'th party had increased substantially. Baghdad was now engaged in a piecemeal nationalization of Western oil interests. It had made crucial concessions to the ICP, which was now a partner in the government coalition and shared responsibility for the regime's successes and failures. And finally, although the Ba'th had not modified their intransigent position toward the Arab-Israel conflict, Moscow's needs had changed in such a way as to make that intransigence useful to it. The Kurds, however, had served their function: Continued Kurdish autonomy forced Baghdad to turn to Moscow for the weapons with which to defeat them. The Soviets were now cashing in the chips they had been slowly accumulating for 30 years.

The result was that when the new autonomy law was proclaimed in March 1974, the Soviets dropped their longstanding support for the Kurds and backed Baghdad instead. Pravda published an unprecedented attack on Kurdish leaders for not accepting the regime's new autonomy law, charging that

Kurdish leaders were not free from interference by imperialist and other reactionary forces, who are trying to sow discord between the Kurdish and Arab populations of Iraq

[1] NYT 3/15/74 and 4/9/74.

and weaken the present progressive regime in that country. [2]

Visits by Saddam Hussein in February and Soviet Defense Minister Grechko in March produced a major arms transfer agreement including MiG-21s, 23s, and SU-7s destined for use in a ground attack role against the Kurds. As the war continued into the fall and winter of 1974, Baghdad was to turn to the Soviet Union several more times for assistance. Soviet aid, unlike that provided by the United States or Iran, was kept up continuously throughout the war and at fairly high levels.

THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT

In the period 1972-75, the Soviet and Iraqi positions on Palestine fell into greater--although not total--alignment. This was the result more of growing Soviet dependence on Iraq than the reverse, although both countries shared common interests at certain points. Before mid-1972 Moscow tried to prevent Egypt from attacking Israel across the canal, and without Egypt there was little chance that Iraq would move on her own. It therefore made little sense for the Soviets to reward Iraqi intransigence unnecessarily by providing them with large quantities of weapons.

Some time in the fall of 1972, the Soviets decided that they might have to permit Sadat to exercise his military option if they were to regain the position lost by the expulsion of advisers in July. If Sadat went to war, a real Iraqi intervention capability would be desirable to strengthen the Arab war alliance and to forestall the need for direct Soviet

[1] CDSP, Vol. 26, No. 17, p. 17. A second article in Pravda supporting the autonomy plan appeared on April 17, 1974, in NYT.

participation. This shift in Moscow's strategy may explain the large consignment of aircraft and ground forces equipment procured by Saddam Hussein during a visit to Moscow in September 1972, concurrent with the resumption of deliveries to Egypt. It may also be the reason why the Russians shipped TU-22 Blinder bombers to Iraq in the course of 1973, although there is no evidence that these aircraft were ever used during the October War.

When Egypt and Syria attacked Israel on October 6, 1973, the Soviet Union and Iraq found themselves in a unique coincidence of interests. Three days into the war Brezhnev sent a letter to Bakr requesting that Iraq ship 500 tanks to Syria to replace the heavy losses in the initial fighting on the Golan Heights.[1] The Iraqis, despite previous indications of a reluctance to intervene, must have felt compelled to do so: On the one hand, failure to aid the confrontation states in a war would have exposed the hypocrisy of their normal stance; on the other, they could do so under the safest possible circumstances. Although they did not honor Brezhnev's request in the precise manner suggested, they did send an armored division to the Syrian front.[2] Consistent with past policies, however, the Iraqis used their "rejection" of the ceasefire resolution, 338, as an excuse for withdrawing their forces almost immediately after the end of the fighting.

[1] Safran (1978), p. 480.

[2] ARR 75/276. Iraqi behavior during the oil crisis was typical of their usual behavior toward the Arab-Israel conflict. Pretending to be yet more radical than other OPEC members, Iraq nationalized some U.S. and Dutch holdings in the Basra Petroleum Company, which it had been planning to do anyway. Claiming that this was a greater "blow" to the West than the embargo, Iraq then actually raised its oil production, profiting handsomely in the process.

After the war, Iraqi and Soviet interests continued to coincide on the Palestine question, but for different reasons. The Soviets now turned their efforts toward obstructing the Kissinger-Sadat step-by-step negotiations, which dovetailed with Iraqi opposition to negotiations of any sort. When the Soviet-Egyptian dispute became public in April 1974, the Soviets were much more open in their support of Iraq.[1] In joint communiques, both sides criticized Sadat for breaking ranks with the other Arab states and stressed their common support for the Palestinian national cause.[2]

IRAN AND THE PERSIAN GULF

Iraqi dependence on the Soviet Union increased because Iraq found itself in conflict with Iran on several fronts. The most important of these, Kurdistan, has been mentioned as a separate case. But there were also disputes over the following issues:

[1] The major Pravda article cited on page 39 was published in late April, shortly after the dispute with Egypt was made public but more than a month after the reopening of the war in the north. This suggests a direct link between the Israeli and Kurdish issues in Soviet thinking. See Carrière d'Encausse (1975), p. 294.

[2] See, for example, the communique of April 17, 1975, which states:

The two sides reaffirmed that the cohesion of the Arab states on an anti-imperialist basis and the strengthening of cooperation with their true friends, first of all the socialist countries, are highly important factors in ensuring success in the struggle against Israeli aggression. (CDSP, Vol. 27.)

There was still an underlying disagreement over the desirability of negotiations, however. The same communique fails to mention the desirability of a renewed Geneva conference, a phrase the Soviet Union succeeded in extracting from its other clients at the time.

(1.) In November 1971 Iran seized the islands of Greater and Lesser Tunbs and Abu Musa in the Straits of Hormuz. The Iranian action was resented by all Persian Gulf Arab states, and by Iraq in particular, because sovereignty over the islands had previously been Arab; moreover, the move seemed part of a larger design by the Shah to assert his hegemony over the Gulf.

(2.) Iraqi and Iranian troops fought each other directly in the spring and summer of 1974 over the location of the border between the two countries in the southeast sector of Kurdistan near the town of Khanaqin. The Iraqis had for long claimed that the territory on the Iranian side of the frontier, known as Khuzestan, should be granted autonomy because it was inhabited by Arabs. In fact, the clash should be regarded as a secondary theater of the Kurdish conflict. The Iraqis were hoping to obstruct Iranian aid to the Kurds by stirring up domestic instability in Khuzestan, and the Iranians were trying to divert Iraqi troops from the Kurdish front by massing troops along the border.

(3.) Both sides continued to fight a proxy war in the Dhofar province of Oman, the Iraqis giving assistance to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman and the Iranians intervening directly on behalf of the Sultan of Oman.

(4.) As a result of the threat to Basra posed by Iranian encroachment on the Shatt al-Arab, in March 1973 the Iraqis claimed sovereignty over the Kuwaiti islands of Warba and Bubiyan, which guard the approaches to Iraq's other port of Umm Qasr. This provoked an Iranian warning not to interfere with Kuwait, because it revived memories of Kassem's 1961 attempt to absorb the whole of that country.

The four conflicts had the cumulative effect of increasing the area of conflict engendered by the Kurdish war and resulted in heightened Iraqi dependence on the Soviet Union. Moscow was willing to provide arms over these issues because it had little sympathy for Iraq's opponents in each case. We can trace at least one major arms transfer agreement in this period directly to Iran: In 1971 the Soviets provided Iraq with a number of fast patrol boats, apparently in response to the Iranian seizure of the islands. The Iranian threat in a general way probably had some effect on the level of later transfer agreements that have been linked to more specific causes.

From late 1971 to the end of the Kurdish war in 1975, the Soviet Union agreed to deliver to Iraq weapons whose value was more than \$1.7 billion. This was well over twice the total amount of military assistance Moscow had given in the entire 13 years since the fall of the monarchy. There were five major transfer agreements; the two with the largest dollar value appeared by their timing and contents to be destined for use against the Kurds, two for use against Israel, and one against Iran. It is of course impossible to be precise in attributing motives for particular transfers, because a given piece of equipment can be used against a variety of opponents, but it does seem safe to conclude that the major source of growth in the Iraqi armed forces in this period, and a correspondingly important cause of Iraqi dependence on the Soviet Union, was the Kurdish conflict.

The most important payoff for Moscow of increased Iraqi dependence was a significant improvement in the position of the ICP. The timing of Bakr's announcement of a new National Action Charter in November 1971 suggests that the Ba'th decided to smooth the way toward the Friendship Treaty by

relenting on the issue of Communist participation in government. The Charter called for "sincere work to provide a new and positive atmosphere for the relations between progressive domestic (i.e., Communist) and national forces." [1] The program was modified over earlier versions by calling for closer relations with the Soviet bloc and led to the entrance of two members of the ICP Politburo, Mukarram Talabani and Amir Abdullah, into the cabinet. The Kazzar coup attempt the following year led directly to the formation of the Progressive National Front (PNF) in July 1973. The power of the Communist cabinet ministers was limited, but the party was legalized for the first time since Kassem and could proceed to build an organizational base more openly.

[1] FBIS MEA, 11/17/71.

VII. THE TURN AWAY FROM MOSCOW, 1975-80

Early 1975 was the high tide of Soviet influence in Iraq. Arms transfers reached record levels, for use in the struggle against several common enemies: Israelis, American oil companies, Kurds, Iranians, and a panoply of lesser reactionaries, puppets, and stooges. Then, suddenly, Soviet arms shipments were cut off entirely by the middle of the year and patron and client found themselves on opposite sides of several political issues. The cause of these developments was simply a reversal of those conditions of dependence that had operated earlier, allowing the latent antagonisms to surface.

THE SOURCES OF REDUCED IRAQI DEPENDENCE

Iraq began to require far less Soviet assistance in 1975 because of the March 1975 Algiers agreement with Iran, and the revolution in world oil markets brought about by the oil crisis of 1973-74.

On March 15, 1975, Iraq and Iran announced at an OPEC meeting in Algiers an agreement by which Iraq recognized Iran's claim to the eastern half of the Shatt al-Arab river in return for "strict and effective" border controls and the "end to all subversive infiltration,"--a dropping of Iranian support for the Kurds.[1] The Kurdish war was brought to a sudden end. A renewed Iraqi offensive the next day led to a quick collapse of armed Kurdish resistance as the Pesh Merga gave up the fight and attempted to cross the Iranian border before it was closed on April 1. The area of cooperation between Iraq and Iran extended far beyond this initial quid pro quo. A treaty and three protocols signed on June 13 rectified the entire

[1] ARR 75/163.

land border between the two countries and apparently contained secret understandings to bring an end to other sorts of subversive activities such as the encouragement of Shii discontent or Khuzestani separatism.[1] The Ba'thist leaders of Iraq demonstrated their willingness to give up a variety of levers they possessed against their ideological opponent, the Shah, in return for a favorable settlement of the conflict in Kurdistan.

he Algiers agreement signaled the successful reassertion of control by Saddam Hussein's pragmatic wing of the Ba'th Party. He had met the challenge posed in 1973 by the hardline elements in the civilian and military branches of the party when he took on the hardline position himself and accepted Soviet help to see it through to a successful conclusion. Once the sources of discontent had been removed, he felt free to return to his original policies. Détente with Iran still aroused opposition: The Syrian press throughout 1975 reported executions of Ba'th party members who were opposed to the Algiers agreement.[2] But once the Iranian issue had been decoupled from the more emotional Kurdish one, the opposition was neither widespread nor uncontrollable.

The Soviets could not have been pleased with these developments. They had armed the Iraqis to enable them to impose a military solution on the Kurds, but they probably did not expect either the speed with which the war was concluded or the scope of the final settlement. In April 1975, Saddam Hussein announced that relations with Iran were now "proceeding in such a

[1] This is to be inferred from the Shah's statement that Iraq's implementation of the various agreements left nothing to be desired, and the fact that Iran went out of its way to support the Ba'th government in conflicts with its own minorities. See for example Mideast Events, March 24, 1978; or Economist, May 29, 1976.

[2] ARR 75/308.

way as to reduce the search for procurement of arms." Moreover, he announced that Iraq would begin consultations with Iran and other Persian Gulf states over the possibility of "security structures" designed to make the Gulf a "zone of peace" free of foreign military bases.[1] Although an agreement of this sort would exclude the U.S. navy's small Mideast Force from Bahrein, it would also foreclose whatever expansionist designs the Russians may have had for Umm Qasr and other staging areas in Iraq.

A comparison of the troubles the Soviets faced in Iraq and Egypt during this period is instructive. In both cases Moscow had hoped to gain influence with its client by providing arms for use in a regional conflict; in both instances Soviet influence was undercut because a third party with direct leverage over the regional opponent could offer the client a more favorable deal. Just as the United States promised to "deliver" Israeli concessions to Egypt, so the Iranians handed over the Kurds to Baghdad.

Iraqi independence of the Soviet Union in the area of economics had been developing over a longer period of time. In the 1960s and early 1970s the Western oil companies exerted oligopolistic control over Iraq's crude oil production because of the generally favorable supply conditions prevailing worldwide. At that time the Soviet Union could play a crucial role in breaking the oligopoly. But with the shift from a buyer's to a seller's market signaled by the increase in crude oil prices in 1973-74, Iraq was in a position to secure very favorable terms from Western companies to develop and market its oil.

[1] ARR 75/248; see also NYT 6/15/76 and 7/2/78. Although negotiations dragged on for several years, nothing came of the idea because of Iraqi opposition to Kuwaiti participation in any collective security arrangement.

In 1974 the Soviets sold a consignment of Iraqi oil they had purchased at pre-oil crisis prices at the going international rate. The Iraqis were furious at this piece of mercenary behavior. Henceforth they would sell the oil directly to their European customers without the Soviet middleman.[1] Iraq also began to acquire the monetary resources to purchase capital equipment for their other development projects; the West remained the principal suppliers, in terms of both price and quality. Baghdad rapidly redirected its pattern of trade away from the Soviet bloc and back toward the West. In 1973 Moscow was its largest trading partner; in 1975 the Soviet Union accounted for less than 10 percent of Iraqi imports, with West Germany, Japan, the United States, and France doing a larger share of business.[2]

NEW AREAS OF CONFLICT WITH MOSCOW

No sooner was the war in Kurdistan over than Iraq leaped into a new conflict, this time with Syria. Far from being the sort of dispute that Moscow could exploit to increase its own influence, the struggle between the Iraqi and Syrian Ba'th parties was highly dangerous to the Russian position in the region, given its interests in both countries.

The controversy originally flared up over the partition of the waters of the Euphrates river. In July 1974 the Syrians completed work on the Tabaqa Dam, a project to divert the Euphrates water for irrigation purposes undertaken with Soviet help. One month after the Algiers agreement the Iraqis complained that the Syrians were using the dam to block water necessary for Iraqi agriculture. The two countries met under Arab League

[1] Boston Globe, 7/10/75.

[2] Wall Street Journal, 9/16/75.

auspices to agree on the percentages of the river's waters each was to receive, but they failed to reach a compromise. This dispute was followed by a series of minor provocations on either side, leading finally to a massing of troops on each other's borders in June 1975.[1]

The real cause of the dispute between these two parties that were outwardly so similar will sound familiar to students of the Sino-Soviet rift. Because the Ba'th is a centralized, hierarchical party that purports to be the sole representative of the Arab nation as a whole, both parties are bound to claim the mantle of Ba'thist legitimacy. Precisely because the parties are ideologically similar, each regards the other as an intolerable threat to its authority. This explains why Iraq could have bad relations with Syria and excellent relations with a "reactionary" Iran at the same time. The conjunction of the two may indeed be more than accidental: The Syrians' charge that Baghdad turned against them as a smokescreen to divert attention from its accommodation with Iran is very plausible in view of the speed with which the one followed the other.

The deterioration in Iraqi-Syrian relations came at a particularly bad time for Moscow, because it coincided with a Soviet effort to bring the two regimes together in common opposition to Sadat's signing of the Sinai II agreement. The Soviets hoped to relieve Syrian fears of creating a "Northern Front" between Syria, Iraq, and the PLO. Baghdad, too, called for a Northern Front, but it set a precondition that was unacceptable to both Moscow and Damascus: The explicit Syrian renunciation of Resolutions 242 and 338. The Iraqi move was extremely clever: By their

[1] Sinai and Pollack, pp. 75-78.

"ultrarejectionist" demands they could appear to be even more radical than Syria, while in practice they avoided a real commitment.

Iraq also effected a de facto rapproachment with Egypt that ran counter to Soviet efforts aimed at isolating Sadat. Although the Iraqi Ba'th attacked Cairo for signing the Sinai II agreements, they praised it for being "frank" about its capitulationism. Syria, however, was bitterly criticized for being both capitulationist and hypocritical.[1] At a time when Iraqi agents were making assassination attempts against the Syrian leadership, Sadat journeyed openly to Baghdad and came away with an offer of \$80 million to help finance oil purchases.[2] Finally, according to one report the Iraqis began quietly to ship spare parts for Egypt's Soviet-supplied arsenal to help it get around Moscow's 1974 arms embargo.[3] Baghdad's actions cast doubt on the sincerity of its verbal intransigence toward Israel.

It was in the context of these growing political differences that the Soviets reportedly decided to suspend all arms deliveries to Iraq in late June and early July 1975.[4] Information is not available to determine whether this cutoff was as dramatic as the one imposed on Egypt, or whether it was instead a simple slowing down of the rate of deliveries. However,

[1] ARR 75/496.

[2] ARR 75/308. There have been numerous assassination attempts against both Iraqi and Syrian Ba'thist leaders. The identity of the killers is generally thought to be each country's intelligence branch, though there has been some speculation that the KGB has been behind many of the attempts. The Syrian assassination attempts may be the product of sectarian resentments against the current leadership. There is certainly an element of that in the Syrian-Iraqi dispute. See Foreign Report, 6/29/77 and 4/19/78; and Washington Post, 4/7/78.

[3] This is reported in Mideast Events, 3/24/78. The same article also notes that despite Iraq's condemnation of Sadat's trip to Jerusalem in November 1977, Iraqi representatives returned to Egypt two weeks after having been expelled by Sadat.

[4] William Beecher in the Boston Globe, 7/10/75.

no major new arms transfer agreement was signed between the peak of the Kurdish war in December 1975 and the agreement of August 1976.

One can imagine the Soviet concerns that led to this decision: Far from serving their purposes, Iraq was cooperating with Iran and Egypt, trading with the West, and on the brink of war with one of the few remaining Soviet clients in the area, Syria. Both sides were very tightlipped about the nature and sources of their disagreements, however. Sadat had exposed the Soviet arms embargo on Egypt in part because he wanted to demonstrate to American leaders his distance from Moscow. The Iraqis had no comparable need; indeed, they had a considerable incentive to preserve their ties to the Soviet Union despite their current policy differences.

In other respects, the Iraqis' behavior paralleled that of the Egyptians. Instead of giving in to Soviet pressure, they diversified their sources of arms to reduce their vulnerability. In September 1975 Saddam Hussein and the Chief of Staff General Abd al-Jabber Shanshal paid a major state visit to France, where they negotiated an arms sale that in its dollar value was as large as any of the major agreements reached with the Soviet Union. Another military delegation visiting France in December was reportedly interested in purchasing Mirage F-1s, Jaguar fighter-bombers, and Alpha Jet Trainers. [1]

[1] APR 75/496; Le Monde 12/5/75.

THE LEBANESE CIVIL WAR

The deterioration in Iraqi-Soviet relations was halted briefly in 1976 as a result of one of those frequent shifts in Soviet tactical requirements that once again brought about a coincidence of interests between patron and client. Just as Iraqi hostility to Egypt began to serve Soviet purposes after 1973, so Baghdad's quarrel with Syria became useful to Moscow after the outbreak of the Lebanese civil war. This development was not sufficient to reestablish the Soviet position for long; Moscow's influence began to decline almost immediately after the resolution of the Lebanese conflict in late 1976. Indeed, Baghdad was able to use Soviet dependency to further increase its own independence in later dealings with the Russians.

For reasons that lie beyond the scope of this study, when Syria intervened on the side of the Lebanese Christians in the spring of 1976, Moscow sided with the PLO and against Damascus. Relations with Assad's regime reached a low point in June 1976 when a Syrian armored column was launched into Lebanon in direct contravention of a Soviet request not to do so. Fortunately for Moscow, Baghdad did not fail to take advantage of the propaganda opportunity offered by the Syrian intervention. The action was presented as confirmation of the Iraqi charge that the Syrians were as willing as the Egyptians to capitulate on the issue of Palestinian rights. In contrast to the chilly reception afforded Kosygin when he visited Damascus in June, the Soviet leaders secured a joint communique from the Iraqis stating:

The Soviet Union and Iraq will continue to work for the speedy end to the bloodshed in Lebanon and the preservation of its integrity, sovereignty and independence, so that the forces resisting aggression

will emerge from the Lebanese crisis still stronger and more united.[1] [Emphasis added.]

Baghdad also proved useful by taking certain concrete steps to force the Syrians to withdraw. In early June, Iraqi troops were once again massed on the Syrian border, and aid to the pro-Iraqi factions of the PLO was increased. But the regime characteristically failed to commit itself directly in defense of the Palestinians beyond the dispatch of between 150 and 500 troops.[2]

Soviet-Iraqi collaboration against Syria was evidently the motive for the ending of the arms embargo by a massive transfer agreement negotiated on August 12, 1976. The quantities involved were several times larger than anything that had come before and were worth well over a billion dollars. An Iranian source reported that the Soviets agreed to supply 600 T-62 and T-64 tanks, 100 Mig-23s, quantities of SAM-6s, Scud and Scaleboard SSMs, several hundred 155mm and 203mm guns, and a wing of Mig-25s that were to remain under Soviet control. The agreement was also said to include a secret protocol giving Moscow direct access to Iraqi airbases. The size and quality of the transfer is somewhat curious given the purposes for which it seemed to be intended. However, Baghdad had been cut off since early 1975, and Moscow had not replaced the losses incurred in the final stages of the Kurdish war.[3]

[1] CDSP, Vol. 28, No. 22, p. 4.

[2] ARR 76/478, 76/537; Mideast Events 6/30/78.

[3] Foreign Report, 10/13/76; Mideast Events, 11/5/76; ARR 76/626.

The transfer of 600 tanks recalls the 500 tanks Brezhnev requested that Iraq supply to Syria early in the October War, with promises that they would be replaced later. Although Iraq did not lose anywhere near that number of vehicles in combat, it is possible that this deal was a belated payment for services rendered in October 1973.

The domestic situation in Iraq prolonged this period of heightened dependence on the Soviet Union. In February 1977 Saddam Hussein's position was shaken when a series of Shi'a riots broke out in Najaf and Karbala, providing an opportunity for the hardliners to attack the pragmatist wing for excessive leniency. Saddam Hussein responded in his usual way, by taking on the hardline position himself and purging a long-time ally of Bakr's, Izzat Mustapha, for not having been severe enough in his sentencing of the rioters. He was also said to have sought help from the Communists and appealed to his ties with Soviet leaders to bolster his position.[1] By October 1977 he was back in control of the party and army; a cabinet reshuffle brought in his brother-in-law, Adnan Talfah, as Minister of Defense.

A NEW STRATEGY FOR MOSCOW?

If one looked at the fourth quarter 1977 income statement giving the return of the Soviet investment of arms in the Middle East generally, the results would not have been encouraging. The bourgeois nationalist regimes it had chosen as allies in the 1950s and 1960s had proven notoriously unreliable. The most outstanding example was Egypt, where countless billions in military hardware donated over 20 years had not prevented Sadat's defection in 1974. Syria consumed vast quantities of armaments, only to use them against the PLO in Lebanon, and sought to reopen commercial contacts with the West. And finally, the Iraqi Ba'th, after the

[1] Economist, 5/7/77. Saddam Hussein's use of the Communists is mentioned in Beirut Events, 4/22/77, pp. 17-19. See also ARR, 7/75/76 for further reporting on the Najaf-Karbala incidents, and Khadduri (1978), pp. 67-69.

conclusion of the Lebanese civil war in September 1976, resumed its drift toward the West for trade and weapons.

In view of these developments it would not be surprising for the Soviet Union to show increased interest in the use of local Communist parties, which since 1964 had been largely ignored. In 1975 the Egyptian Communist Party was resurrected. In late 1977 Moscow threw its weight behind the Marxist-Leninist Derg in Ethiopia during its conflict with the Islamic Marxist Somalis. In April 1978 the Soviets allowed two Marxist groups, Percham and Khalq, to overthrow the pro-Soviet nationalist Daud regime in Afghanistan, and they almost certainly played a role in a similar coup in South Yemen two months later.[1]

This trend lends credibility to speculation that Moscow hoped to use the Iraqi Communist Party in a similar action against the Ba'th Party in the winter of 1977. The ICP was fairly well placed to make a bid for power. Its position in the Progressive National Front permitted it to take advantage of considerable dissatisfaction prevalent in the army caused by Saddam Hussein's accommodation with Iran.

In March 1978 an ICP political report attacked the Ba'th for its failure to join the Steadfastness and Confrontation Front, praised the Assad regime in Syria, and criticized Iraq's rapprochement with the conservative Arab regimes and Iran.[2] More significantly, it had by this time apparently begun to set up cells in the army, which since 1958 has made or broken regimes in Baghdad.[3]

[1] See Fukuyama (1979).

[2] Mideast Events, 7/14/78.

[3] There is evidence that the ICP had supporters in the army in the 1950s and 1960s. See Dann (1969), p. 390. The great pains that Ba'thist spokesmen took to emphasize that their party alone would indoctrinate the army suggests that the army was indeed a center of Communist activity.

The Iraqi Ba'th's response was remarkable for its vigor and ruthlessness. In May 1978, 21 Communists were executed, and there was an extensive purge of Communist sympathizers in the army.[1] Saddam Hussein explained that the executions were a deliberate warning to Moscow not to interfere in internal Iraqi affairs. In the words of the party paper Ath-Thawra,

The revolution and its command are careful to prevent any political side, including those party to the (Progressive National Front), from working inside the armed forces and determined in advance that there would be "no front in the armed forces," that the only legitimate political action allowed in their ranks would be by the Arab Socialist Ba'th Party, and that the death sentence and the just revolutionary punishment be meted out to anyone who indulged in political action inside the armed forces.[2] [Emphasis added.]

The Ba'th accused the ICP of turning "the front into a temporary coalition (to) enable the democratic atmosphere created by the revolution to be used as a means of killing the revolution and enabling the betraying party to take over rule alone." Saddam Hussein was also explicit about the ultimate source of ICP activities: "The Soviet Union sees its security in spreading Communism...they won't be satisfied until the whole world becomes Communist." [3]

The anti-Communist purge continued at a high level of intensity for well over a year. In October 1978 the police surrounded the Basra ICP headquarters and arrested everyone inside, leading the party's organ Tariq ash-Shab to charge the following month that "persecution and harassment on

[1] NYT, 5/27/78; Middle East Intelligence Survey, Vol. 6, No. 5, pp. 38-40; No. 4, p. 27; Foreign Report, 5/31/78; Los Angeles Times, 6/2/78; Strategic Middle East Affairs, Vol. 4, No. 23.

[2] FBIS MEA, 6/12/78.

[3] Interview with Saddam Hussein by Arnaud de Borchgrave in Newsweek, 7/17/78.

a large scale against our communist party's organizations, comrades, friends, and press are continuing and escalating." [1] In December a new round of executions took place in the army, and toward the end of the month a number of prominent civilian Communists were arrested. Further purges at the beginning of 1979 forced the ICP leadership to flee Iraq altogether and to establish themselves in Moscow. In April the party suspended its membership in the Progressive National Front. [2]

The crackdown led to an almost total breakdown in Iraq's relations with South Yemen. The Iraqi Ba'th had for long regarded President Selim Rubai Ali and the Unified Political Organization--the National Front (UPONF)--as proteges. When Rubai Ali was overthrown and replaced by the hard-line Marxist Abd al-Fattah Ismail in June 1978 with obvious Soviet, Cuban, and East German connivance, the Ba'thists not only lost a client but had a foretaste of what might have happened to them at the hands of the ICP. In May 1979 an Iraqi delegation walked out of a PDRY-sponsored meeting in Aden of the Arab People's Congress, an organization set up to isolate Egypt in retaliation for the signing of the peace treaty with Israel, to protest the bringing into the leadership of the Sudanese Communist Party. [3] In June, an Iraqi Communist who had fled to Aden to escape the purge was gunned down near his home by Iraqi security agents, prompting the South Yemenis to storm the Iraqi embassy with troops and

[1] Agence France Presse dispatch, 12/17/78; Tariq ash-Sha'b, 11/21/78.

[2] Among those arrested in December was ICP Central Committee member Majid Abd al-Rida. Agence France Presse 12/27/78; MEED Arab Report No. 7, 4/25/79, p. 11; ARR 78/919.

[3] NYT, 5/11/79. This was a highly symbolic act because the Sudanese Communists had staged a nearly successful putsch against Jaafar Numeriry in 1971.

tanks to arrest the gunman. The Iraqis retaliated against the PDRY embassy in Baghdad and ambassadors, not surprisingly, were withdrawn on both sides.[1]

We do not have concrete evidence that the ICP was planning a coup d'état beyond the noisy accusations made by the Ba'thists. One possible explanation for Baghdad's behavior was the need to send a signal to the Russians expressing displeasure over Soviet-Cuban support for the Christian Ethiopians in their conflict with the Moslem Eritreans and Somalis in late 1977 to early 1978.[2] Alternatively, the purge might not have had a specific motive but could be rather an expression of Iraqi paranoia. There are several reasons for rejecting either of these explanations in favor of the Ba'thists' own account, however. The first was the very length and severity of the purge, which was hardly necessary if it were meant only as a diplomatic signal. The systematic rooting out of the entire ICP structure within Iraq betokened a serious effort to end the possibility of Communist subversion. Second, the behavior of the present Iraqi leadership is neither irrational nor excessively emotional. It would have made no sense for the Ba'th to antagonize the Soviets by killing Communists when external events, such as the Camp David accords and the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty, dictated at least an outward show of solidarity. The Iraqi Ba'th did engage in such a slaughter during its first tenure in power between February and November 1963, and the party paid heavily in terms of its relations with the Soviet Union. The men who emerged victorious from

[1] MEED, 6//79; MEED Arab Report, No. 11, 6/20/79, p. 2.

[2] The "signal" theory is supported by the fact that several of the Communists executed in May 1978 had actually been in jail for a number of years and therefore could not have posed much of a threat.

the intraparty quarrels between 1963 and 1968 were imbued with the feeling that the earlier anti-Communism was ideologically wrong and pragmatically counterproductive. It seems unlikely that they would have permitted what amounted to a replay of the 1963 events unless they felt there was a real threat from the ICP. Finally, it is important to realize that to some extent the Communist problem in Iraq overlaps with the Shi'a problem. After the decline of the pro-Peking ICP/Central Command in the late 1960s, the pro-Soviet ICP/Central Committee began to derive much of its support from Shi'a discontent in southern Iraq, which had formerly been its rival's power base. The Iraqis may have seen a Communist hand behind the Shi'a disturbances in 1977 and the rise of Ayatollah Khomeini in 1978.

The Soviets were clearly unhappy with Baghdad but impotent to do anything about the situation. They avoided direct criticism of the Ba'th but provided a mouthpiece for the now-muzzled ICP. In January 1979 Pravda published a major statement by a conference of Arab Communist Parties meeting in Damascus.

The campaign against the fraternal Iraqi Communist Party, if continued, will create a real obstacle on the path of uniting the progressive and patriotic Arab forces. The communist and workers parties of the Arab countries condemn such methods in relations with revolutionary forces.[1]

However, the Soviet Union could not use its control over the weapons pipeline to protect the ICP for several reasons. First, on the basis of past experience Baghdad had taken measures to protect itself from another arms embargo. By early 1978 it was reported to have stockpiled enough spare parts for its Soviet equipment to last five years without external

[1] FBIS SOV, 1/18/79.

resupply. The large arms deal in August 1976 had clearly been a source for much of this inventory.[1] Second, Iraq was moving ahead with its diversification plans. Another contract to purchase 60 to 80 Mirage F-1s had been negotiated in September 1976, and deliveries on the initial consignment of missiles and aircraft were taken in the course of 1978.[2] Finally, Baghdad was at peace with its neighbors and the West. The détente policy begun by Saddam Hussein in March 1975 was paying off handsomely in terms of Iraqi freedom of maneuver. With no pressing conflicts to attend to, Iraq could more easily survive a Soviet embargo.

THE REEMERGENCE OF IRAQ

The period between late 1978 and the present (1980) is in certain ways a curious one. It has seen the reemergence of Iraq as a major actor in both the Arab-Israeli and Persian Gulf theaters. In the past this type of foreign policy activism has led to increased Iraqi dependence on the Soviet Union and consequently greater cooperation between Baghdad and Moscow. What is remarkable about recent events is that areas of conflict with Moscow, such as the anti-Communist purge, have persisted throughout the period in question. This indicates that Baghdad's oil income and its efforts to diversify its sources of outside patronage have secured it a long-term freedom from the swings between dependence and independence that characterized its earlier relations with Moscow. Whether this is a genuine secular change, or merely a stretching out of the cycle, is a question for the future.

[1] NYT, 7/1/78.

[2] ARR, 76/537. The French were also busy supplanting the Soviets in the area of nuclear energy, where they had agreed to supply Iraq with a 70 megawatt experimental reactor. Washington Post, 2/27/78.

Iraq's reemergence was triggered, at the outset, by developments in neighboring Iran. The first major religiously inspired demonstrations against the Shah's regime broke out in January 1978 and continued at 40-day intervals. By September, when the Camp David accords were being negotiated, they had begun to assume a more serious character and spread to a number of Iranian cities. Ordinarily the impending internal collapse of Iraq's major pro-Western military rival in the Persian Gulf would have been the occasion for much rejoicing in Baghdad, but the militant Shi'a character of the revolution created a new and acute security threat. The Iraqis saw the comfortable relationship they enjoyed with the Shah on the verge of unravelling, with the possibility of serious Iranian-inspired unrest developing in the large Shi'a community in the south of Iraq.[1] Iraq's political strategy to meet this challenge took two parallel courses: First, they sought to mend their fences with the rest of the Arab world, particularly with their arch-rival Syria; and second, they initiated a campaign of pressure, threats, and intimidation against Iran designed to bring about the overthrow of Ayatollah Khomeini and his replacement with a more responsible leadership.

[1] The Iraqis can be surprisingly frank about their real beliefs. A high-ranking Iraqi official told the Paris-based Al-Mustaqbal (2/2/79) shortly before Khomeini came to power:

We, that is Iraq, no longer have any outstanding problems with the Shah. All our border, Kurdish, and water problems with Iran have been solved. We, that is Iraq, are the ones who advised Ayatollah Khomeini to leave Iraq out of our desire to maintain neighborly ties with Iran, because we would not welcome any radical change to the Iranian regime.

Relations with Syria

The first of these initiatives took the form of greater cooperation with those Arab states opposed to Egypt's reconciliation with Israel. Partly as a result of the disunity among the confrontation states referred to above, Egyptian President Sadat was able to sign the Camp David accords with Israel and the United States in September 1978. The fear of further isolation impelled the Syrians in turn to seek accommodation with the Iraqis. The result was a degree of Arab unity that surprised many longtime observers of Syrian-Iraqi relations.

Syrian President Assad visited Iraq on October 26 for the first time in five years and signed a "National Charter of Joint Action" with his Iraqi confreres. The Charter laid down general guidelines for various economic and cultural agreements; more important, it promised complete military union to counter the "treacherous agreement between the Egyptian regime and the Zionist enemy." [1] Baghdad agreed in principle to establish the long-awaited Northern Front with Syria, without the condition of Syrian rejection of Resolutions 242 and 338--a clear and uncharacteristic act of compromise. This then paved the way for Baghdad's hosting of a conference of anti-Sadat confrontation states on November 1. For the first time since the October War, Moscow found itself on the same side of not only Syria and Iraq but Saudi Arabia and Kuwait as well. The Baghdad Conference voted to take a number of measures to head off a separate peace treaty between Egypt and Israel, such as a \$9 billion fund literally to buy off the Egyptians. Iraq's active participation in the proceedings demonstrated the degree to which it had come to wear the more pragmatic face long advocated by Moscow.

[1] See ARR 781764-765.

This temporary alignment with the Soviets was not due to Soviet pressure, however, but arose ultimately as an aftereffect of the Iranian revolution.

Although Iraq and Syria were finally following Soviet advice after years of fruitless exhortation, there were signs that the Russians were not entirely happy with the course of the unity talks as they developed after October 1978. In November the Syrians got into a rather widely publicized squabble with the Soviets over the latter's refusal to sell them "nuclear capable aircraft" (presumably MiG-27s) and long-range surface-to-surface missiles.[1] This hesitation may have been a form of pressure related to the question of cooperation with Baghdad. Furthermore, there was a distinct coolness in Soviet references to the bilateral negotiations going on between the two Ba'th parties, as opposed to the warm support for the Baghdad Conference confrontation states.[2]

[1] Kuwaiti News Agency, 12/7/78; Agence France Presse, 12/9/78; Christian Science Monitor, 11/30/78.

[2] See, for example, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Soviet and East European Research Centre, Bulletin: The Soviet Union and the Arab-Israeli Conflict, Vol. III, Nos. 24-25, 12/16/78 and 1/15/79, pp. 2-3. Soviet ambivalence toward Iraq was also evident during Saddam Hussein's visit to Moscow between December 12 and 13, 1978. The Russians could not afford to be seen slackening their support for Baghdad after Camp David; the joint communique at the end of the visit noted, "The Soviet side highly assessed the resolve manifested by the leaders of Iraq and Syria to act in unison with the objective of frustrating the capitulatory course in Middle Eastern affairs." The Soviets also pledged to strengthen "the defense capacity of the Iraqi Republic," a phrase usually portending a major arms deal, which had been notably absent from the communique at the end of the Assad visit the previous October. (FBIS SOV, 12/14/78.) But Moscow's unhappiness with Iraq was signalled by the low-key manner in which Saddam Hussein was received, which stood in sharp contrast to the ceremony surrounding the Assad visit. When Assad arrived in Moscow for a state visit on October 5, 1978, he was greeted at the airport by Brezhnev, Kosygin, Gromyko, Ustinov, and others. By contrast, when Saddam Hussein arrived on December 11 for a similar visit, he was received only by Kosygin and Kuznetsov. Brezhnev's failure to appear may be explained by illness, but not that of Gromyko and Ustinov. FBIS SOV, 10/5/78 and 12/12/78.

There are several possible explanations for the Soviet attitude. First of all, the Iraqi-Syrian talks did not in fact lead to concrete agreements on steps to be taken against Israel, in the form of a mutual defense treaty or the stationing of Iraqi troops on Syrian soil. The Russians were probably less than enthusiastic about the prospect of endless accumulation of weapons stockpiles in the two countries, when better results could be had through cooperation. Second, the Soviets must have been worried about the possible effects of a genuine merger of the two Ba'th parties. This might mean the spreading of the anti-Communist purge to Syria as well. There was a precedent for this: Khrushchev had been unhappy with the Egyptian-Syrian merger into the United Arab Republic in 1958, when the leadership of the Syrian Communist Party was forced to flee to Moscow as a result.[1] Moreover, in 1978 Moscow may have feared that some of the Iraqi Ba'th's intransigence on the Arab-Israeli issue would spill over to the Syrians.[2]

Iraqi attempts to end its self-imposed isolation in the Arab world took a variety of forms. The border skirmishes that broke out between North and South Yemen in February 1979 threatened to polarize the Arabian peninsula between pro-Western and pro-Soviet forces as Saudi Arabia and the United States rushed to support the YAR. The Iraqis played a major role in procuring a ceasefire between the two sides so as to prevent a Saudi defection from the Baghdad front.[3] When Egypt and Israel signed a final peace treaty on March 26, Baghdad once again hosted a meeting of anti-Sadat Arab foreign and economic ministers. Instead of acting to disrupt the

[1] See Smolansky (1974), Ch. 3.

[2] This is suggested by Golan (1973), p. 3.

[3] NYT, 3/3/79.

front as they had at the 1977 Tripoli conference, the Iraqis this time helped to mediate a series of retaliatory measures against Egypt, including severance of diplomatic relations, expulsion from the Arab League, and economic sanctions. The Soviets had reason to be pleased with the level of cooperation that emerged from the Baghdad conference, though they still had disagreements with the principals. Gromyko paid a perfunctory visit to Damascus on March 24, after which no statement or defense matters was issued, and he did not stop in Baghdad at all. This seemed to indicate, on the one hand, Soviet concern over the level of armaments being accumulated by Syria, and on the other, unhappiness with the continuing anti-Communist purge.[1]

Hopes for substantive Iraqi-Syrian cooperation were dashed altogether as a result of domestic developments in Iraq. Once again the Soviets had little power to affect the course of developments. On July 16, President Bakr, who had been ill for a long time and only nominally in charge, resigned and was replaced by Saddam Hussein. His removal triggered a power struggle from which Saddam Hussein emerged on top, after executing 21 Ba'th party members, including five members of the Revolutionary Command Council. The executed were charged with having planned a coup d'etat, and widespread rumors pointed to either Syria or the Soviet Union as outside instigators.[2] We will probably never know the full sequence of events in July and August, but the foreign conspiracy theories are neither necessary nor particularly credible as a means of explaining the succession crisis. As we have seen in earlier power struggles, Saddam Hussein's position in

[1] MEED Arab Report, No. 6, 4/11/79, pp. 8-9.

[2] Wright, pp. 266-268.

the Ba'th party owed much to Bakr's patronage, especially among the military. Once the latter was out of the picture, Saddam Hussien was in a very vulnerable position. Those in the party hoping to seize power from him would have been tempted to strike quickly; alternatively, Saddam Hussein may have launched a preemptive purge to prevent any such developments. In terms of foreign policy, the effect was to sour relations with Syria and to end the projects for further movement toward unity. This was a result with which the Soviets could not have been pleased.

Relations with Iran

In the meantime, the second aspect of Iraqi strategy was putting pressure on the Iran of Ayatollah Khomeini in reaction to the Iranians' irresponsible behavior. The Iraqis welcomed Khomeini's return to Teheran in January and may have hoped to reach some accommodation with the new leadership on the basis of their common anti-imperialism. But Khomeini had not forgotten Baghdad's collaboration with the Shah in having him deported from Najaf the previous September, or the disenfranchised position of the Shi'a community in Iraq. Ayatollah Khomeini's personal representative, Ayatollah Rezvani, was sent to Najaf where he apparently played some role in the Shi'a disturbances that occurred there in early June; when the Iraqi authorities arrested him and the Iraqi Shi'a leader Ayatollah Mohammed Sayed Bakr, Teheran threatened Baghdad directly.[1] On September 24 Ayatollah Sadek Rouhaini openly called on the Shiis of Bahrein to rise up and overthrow their Sunni ruler, leading to stern warnings from Iraq not to

[1] Washington Post, 6/13/79; Middle East, 7/79, p.10.

interfere.[1] Moreover, the revolutionary government (or non-government) in Teheran was unable to control the separatist agitation of the Iranian Kurds, which had potentially serious spillover affects. The Iraqis retaliated by trying to subvert Khomeini in any way possible: They resumed their support for the separatist demands of the Arabs in Khuzestan, pursued Kurdish rebels into Iranian territory, and openly called for the overthrow of the "racist lunatic" Ayatollah Khomeini.

The prospect of bad relations between Iraq and Iran poses a potentially acute dilemma for Moscow. It is clear that the Soviets cannot continue to lean toward Iraq as they have done in the past. Baghdad's anti-Communism makes it less attractive as a client, and the Russians might sense greater opportunities in Iran. It is a larger, wealthier, and ultimately more influential country than Iraq. Although the Russians have little in common with Ayatollah Khomeini beyond his anti-Americanism, further political chaos in that country might bring a more ideologically sympathetic group to power. It is possible to imagine circumstances under which the Soviet Union might decide to throw substantial support to Teheran in preference to Baghdad and put their entire relationship at risk..

It was perhaps in view of such a possibility that the Iraqis turned almost exclusively to France for their weapons needs in the midst of the tensions with Iran. In May 1979, Defense Minister Adrian Khairallah visited France and Spain and placed firm orders for some \$250 million of new weapons. These included a second squadron of 40 Mirage F-1s, two 3,200 ton antisubmarine fighters, six Cherbourg-class fast patrol boats, Super-Frelon helicopters, and a large number of AMX-30 tanks. He expressed an

[1] Economist, 9/29/79.

interest in contracts totaling as much as \$1.6 billion, with an additional \$900 million in Spain. Were such transactions ever to materialize, France would surpass the Soviet Union in the dollar volume of arms transferred.[1]

The most serious blow to Soviet-Iraqi relations came with the Russian intervention in Afghanistan on December 27, 1979. As noted earlier, the Iraqi Ba'th were convinced that the Soviets had wanted to replace them with a more tractable Communist regime. They viewed Taraki's coup against the Daud regime in Afghanistan and Abd al-Fattah Ismail's overthrow of Selim Rubai Ali in the PDRY in much the same light: In both cases left-wing nationalist clients of the USSR had been replaced by more staunchly pro-Soviet Marxist-Leninist groups.[2] Indeed, the April 1978 coup in Kabul had been partially responsible for the severity of the Ba'thist crackdown on the ICP later that spring. The Iraqis' reaction to the 1979 intervention was therefore predictably quite severe. It not only foreshadowed what might happen to other Soviet clients that had been signatories of Friendship and Cooperation Treaties but provided a pretext for a major American reentry into the Middle East. Baghdad voted in favor of the January 14 UN General Assembly Resolution deploring the Soviet move and calling for an immediate withdrawal of Russian forces. At the same time a series of critical articles appeared in the Ba'th party newspaper Al-Thawra, charging,

The blatant and large-scale Soviet intervention in Afghanistan's domestic affairs, or let us say "the occupation of Afghanistan," must inevitably provoke the anxiety of all the area's countries, in fact all countries in the world, whether or not they have friendly relations with the Soviet Union.[3]

[1] See Fukuyama (1980), p. 7.

[2] See the Al-Thawra article on the Afghan intervention, 1/4/80.

[3] FBIS MEA, 1/7/80.

Saddam Hussein in a nationwide speech a few days later asserted:

Foreign intervention in Afghanistan is a serious phenomenon. One cannot justify it or find excuses for it. It is an unjustifiable, erroneous behavior that could cause anxiety for all freedom and independence-loving peoples.

Concurrently, he indicated that a major element of his concern remained his anti-imperialism: "At the same time we warn against exploiting the foreign interventions in this or that part of the countries of the area." [1] Also in early January the Kuwaiti and Saudi press ran stories stating that the Afghan intervention had led the Iraqis to consider abrogating their 1971 Friendship and Cooperation Treaty with the Soviet Union. [2]

The Iraqi attitude has led to a noticeable sharpening of the rhetorical battle on the part of Moscow. Although the Soviets continued to refrain from official attacks on the Iraqi Ba'th, its Arabic-language broadcasts gave vent to some remarkably explicit criticism. One reply to the Al-Thawra articles asserted

The articles were replete with malice and fabrications against the Soviet Union, the loyal friend of the Soviet Union, with whom it is linked by a treaty of friendship and cooperation....

This is generally related to the dangerous direction taken by those who control the paper (i.e., the Ba'th Party) after they deviated from the progressive course which had been pursued by Iraq. Signs of this deviation appeared in the past 2 years through the liquidation of many gains of the Iraqi people and the attempts to strike at the patriotic and progressive forces which are hostile to imperialism, Zionism and reaction, in fact at the Iraqi Communist Party. [3] (Emphasis added.)

But aside from these polemical outbursts, there is very little that the Soviet Union can do about the Iraqi "deviation." The contrast with Syria

[1] Ibid., 1/8/80.

[2] Ibid., 1/7/80.

[3] FBIS SOV, 2/4/80.

is revealing. Damascus abstained on the UN vote and refrained from making overt criticisms of the Soviet invasion. Indeed, Gromyko visited Damascus between January 27 and 29, 1980, and issued a joint communique condemning "the aggressive line of the United States," which was striving to divert attention away from the conflict with Israel "under cover of an artificially whipped-up hullabaloo around the events in Iran and Afghanistan." [1] The reason for this alignment, as President Assad explained to the Saudi Foreign Minister, was that Syria was dependent on Soviet arms and did not want to offend the Russians on an issue they regarded as of vital interest. [2] The Iraqis, by contrast, were free of such dependence by virtue of their dealings with the French and their oil income. They were, furthermore, closer geographically to an East-West battleground in the Persian Gulf and could not afford to be indifferent to superpower activities there. The beginning of 1980 thus saw Iraq more estranged from the Soviet Union than at any time since the coming to power of the Ba'th.

[1] Ibid., 1/30/80.

[2] NYT, 1/15/80

VIII. CONCLUSIONS

It is unfortunately impossible to present a single, clear-cut explanation of why Soviet arms have not been able to buy a greater amount of influence in Iraq than they have in the first ten years of Ba'thist rule. Iraqi foreign policy differs from Egypt's insofar as it is not preoccupied with a single issue, such as the conflict with Israel, to the exclusion of all else. The Soviet influence in Egypt and its loss after 1972 can be traced to the military needs engendered by this one conflict. Soviet advisors were expelled originally because Moscow did not want to take the risks associated with a new Middle East war. Their exclusion continued because Henry Kissinger was able to promise Sadat a return of the Sinai through negotiations more plausibly than could the Russians with their war option.

Because of Iraq's position at the intersection of several different geographical orbits, it has faced a variety of enemies and conflicts that boil up and subside at unpredictable intervals. For a while it looked as if the Kurds would play a role in Iraqi foreign policy similar to Israel's with regard to Egypt. If there is a single independent variable that could be related to the level of arms transfers and the state of Soviet-Iraqi relations, it is probably the Kurdish-Iranian factor. But this was only one problem among many. The period of intense collaboration between 1971 and 1975 that brought Communist ministers into the government was the product of the simultaneous germination of confrontation with the Iraq Petroleum Company, Israel, and Iran, quite apart from the renewed war in 1973. The ending of the Kurdish conflict did not prevent a sudden resurgence of Soviet influence in 1976 because of the conflict with Syria

The different factions within the Ba'th party leadership provide a common thread that links the Iraqi response to the different problems the country faces. For example, it was the same pragmatic civilian wing led by Saddam Hussein that engineered both the March 1970 settlement with the Kurd and the 1970-71 disengagement from the Palestine front. This group again swung the country back toward détente by negotiating the 1975 Algiers agreement with Iran and by shifting Iraq's trade patterns back to the West. If one had to point to one factor that has tended to weaken the Soviet position in Iraq, it is Saddam Hussein and the growth of his control over the party and the army.

At the same time, there are also vocal hardline wings of the civilian and military branches of the party responsible for pushing Iraqi foreign policy in the opposite direction and consequently closer to the Soviet Union. The strength of these groups is partly related to external developments, but in large measure it is affected by hidden party infighting, which becomes public only through such dramatic events as the Rawi or Kazzar coups. Various factions do not necessarily replace one another in power; what seems to have happened instead is that the Saddam Hussein and Bakr leadership preempted hardline criticisms by themselves adopting more activist policies. Therefore, although Saddam Hussein has generally sought to restrict ties to the Soviet Union, he was paradoxically also the chief architect of the 1972 Friendship Treaty.

Iraq's ideological enemies should not take excessive comfort in the current ascendancy of the pragmatic civilian faction. The moderation of their present policies is not the product of ideological laxness but of a sense of realism. Until now Iraq has generally not had the military or economic power to impose its will on Iran or Israel. But should conditions

change--for example, as a consequence of the upheaval in Iran--we might find Saddam Hussein undoing the very détente he had created in 1975.

Past Soviet reluctance to support Iraq wholeheartedly against Iran or Kuwait should not be taken as a constant factor in future conflicts in the area. At certain crucial instances Moscow did not hesitate to push Baghdad into more aggressive policies, such as during the October War or in the final conflict in Kurdistan. There is no inherent reason why a conjunction of political circumstances might not arise in the future where the Soviets would help the Iraqis to go for broke. Again, the domestic troubles in Iran might serve as a pretext for Soviet support of an Iraqi attempt to "liberate" Kuwait or Khuzistan.

Iraq and not the Soviet Union has been primarily responsible for determining the degree of distance in the relationship. Of course, Moscow set certain conditions for giving assistance. For example, the Soviet Union did not provide arms simply to allow Baghdad to defeat the Kurds but sought to modify the Iraqi stand on the ICP and Israel as well. It is true that the offer of Soviet weapons was sufficient to "purchase" Iraqi cooperation on ICP participation in the 1973 Progressive National Front, but it took the Ba'th five years to accept the offer. It was the Ba'th again that decided to sign the Algiers agreement, end sole dependence on the USSR for weapons, and diversify its trade patterns. The Soviets took the initiative by embargoing Iraq in 1975, and they may have forced it to be more cooperative than otherwise in Lebanon the following year; but Baghdad in the end outwitted Moscow by using the momentary retightening of relations to stock up on spare parts and reduce Soviet leverage for the future. This is what allowed Baghdad to clamp down on Communist activity as hard as it did in 1978.

One of the consequences of the Soviet Union's weak position in Iraq is that it has never been allowed to establish a direct military presence in that country. The Iraqis have always insisted that there were no foreign bases of any sort in their country. In February 1975 the American columnists Evans and Novak were given a tour of the new port of Umm Qasr, which led them to conclude that it was definitely not a Soviet base, as some had contended. Nevertheless, there were reports that the Soviets had used Iraqi airbases to stage resupply missions to Ethiopia in the winter of 1977-78; there is also evidence that this was one of the factors contributing to Iraqi unhappiness with Moscow and to the purge of Communists.

Arms transfers have not proven a particularly effective source of influence. Over the years they have assured that Iraq would remain, at a minimum, nonaligned and independent of American influence. But they have not been sufficient to buy active Iraqi collaboration on a broad range of issues. There are several reasons for this, some having to do with the nature of arms transfers per se, others being related to the specific situation of Iraq. In the first place, control over the weapons and spare parts pipeline is a rather clumsy instrument of political control. Client states are remarkably willing to endure arms embargoes or delivery slowdowns without giving in to political pressure. Second, with experience it is possible for clients to deal with manipulation of the pipeline, either by building up stockpiles or through diversification of supplies. Third, in the Iraqi case, the French played a major role in freeing Iraq from dependence on Soviet weapons, at least over the short run. This would not have occurred but for an energetic French concern to build a privileged relationship for themselves with Baghdad. Finally, French interest in Iraq

in turn would not have existed but for Baghdad's oil income and its ability to pay for modern weapons with cash. Consequently Soviet influences over a state like Syria without oil resources of its own has been much greater.

Finally, an important long-term trend to emerge from the failure of repeated Soviet attempts to establish their influence in Iraq and elsewhere through arms transfers may be a more aggressive use of local Communist parties in the future all over the Middle East. Moscow has never entirely abandoned the ICP in its dealings with the Ba'th and ultimately succeeded in securing the party's legalization in 1973. It may seem strange to expect forceful action by the ICP when its position in the army has been weakened or even liquidated; but over the long term, there are many social contradictions in Ba'thist Iraq that the ICP and Moscow could try to exploit. Kurdish nationalism is far from dead and the Najaf-Karbala riots are just a token of the potentialities of Shi'a discontent. Ironically, the long despised ICP/Central Command may provide the tactics that lead to a permanent establishment of Communist influence in Iraq.

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